

FIRE REMEDIAL ACTIONS PROGRESS – JULY 2024

Executive Summary

Following the housing service being brought back in-house, there has been an increased focus on fire safety and risk mitigation. This included undertaking Type 3 Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) across the housing portfolio in 2023, which identified 3,790 remedial actions. Following self-referral, the Regulator for Social Housing issued the Council with a regulatory notice on 14 December 2023 for breaching the Home Standard in respect of fire safety.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on progress made to date in terms of delivering the fire safety actions resulting from the FRAs and improving associated practices and processes. Specifically, this report provides the opportunity for the Committee to scrutinise and input to the Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) The report be noted; and
- (ii) The Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy be endorsed.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers:	Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy – July 2024 Regulatory Notice (December 2023): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woking-borough-council/regulatory-notice-woking-borough-council-14-december-2023
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In April 2022, the management of the Council's housing service was brought back in-house. Since then, there has been an increased focus on fire safety and risk mitigation. This included undertaking Type 3 Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) across the housing portfolio between February and August 2023.
- 1.2 The FRAs identified some significant issues with fire safety in the Council's housing stock and identified 3,790 remedial actions. This presents a significant resource and financial challenge for the Council in terms of delivering the volume and scale of work required. However, it is essential to ensure the safety of our residents.
- 1.3 Following self-referral, the Regulator for Social Housing issued the Council with a regulatory notice on 14 December 2023 for breaching the Home Standard in respect of fire safety. The notice stated that the council did not have effective systems in place to manage its health and safety responsibilities, particularly the timely resolution of fire safety remedial actions.

2.0 Purpose and Outcome

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on progress made to date in terms of delivering the fire safety actions resulting from the FRAs and improving associated practices and processes. Specifically, this report provides the opportunity for the Committee to scrutinise and input to the Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy.
- 2.2 The desired outcome is that through increased scrutiny and oversight, residents will be safer in their homes and the risks around building safety will be reduced.

3.0 Background and Process

- 3.1 As set out earlier on the agenda, the Council has established a Housing Improvement Programme to drive service improvement. This is monitored through the Council's wider Improvement and Recovery Plan. A key workstream within the programme is 'Homes and Safety', with a particular focus on remedial actions highlighted in the Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs).
- 3.2 Progress is also reported monthly to the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 3.3 To date, the following actions have been undertaken:
 - Completed External Wall Surveys (EWS) on 14 high-risk flatted blocks on the Lakeview estate where there were concerns that the cladding on the front of the blocks might compromise residents' means of escape if there was a fire. Following this, cladding is being removed in phases starting with the cladding directly below the walkways/landings.
 - Developed a management response to the risks and remedial actions identified from the FRAs and EWS.
 - Appointed a qualified Fire Safety Consultant to oversee and manage the resulting FRA Remedial Actions.
 - Procured 'Compliance 365' Fire Safety Module. This IT System will be used to manage FRAs and FRA remedial actions and is in the final stages of mobilisation. The system has been built and populated with Council property data. A version of the FRA action data has been added to facilitate user training, which is scheduled for 23 July 2024. Once complete, users will have a short period of time to familiarise themselves with the system using the test data. After close of business on 26 July 2024, action data will be updated, and the system will go live on 29 July 2024.

Fire Remedial Actions Progress – July 2024

- Undertaken ongoing proactive tenancy management and resident engagement to ensure communal areas are well maintained and are treated as sterile areas in accordance with tenancy agreements and leases.
- Progressed with development of a resident fire safety communication plan. Draft Fire Safety Booklets have been prepared to be distributed to all existing and future Council residents. Each booklet will explain the action residents should take if they discover a fire in their home, in a communal area or hear a fire alarm. Branded versions of generic Fire Action Notices for display in communal areas of purpose-built flats (stay put) and converted flats (immediate evacuation) have been ordered.
- Instructed a specialist fire safety contractor to complete high priority FRA remedial works actions circa £800k in value with works in delivery. Progress is monitored through fortnightly contract meetings.
- Procured a specialist Building Project Management Consultancy (Bailey Partnership) to support the internal team in delivering high value/specialist fire safety works over the next 2-3 years (estimated).
- Identified further significant works requirements to ensure the housing portfolio is as compliant as possible in terms of fire safety and risk mitigation. Bailey Partnership will commence procurement of further contractors to complete the remedial works.
- Commenced recruitment for a fixed-term Building Safety Surveyor.

3.4 A Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy has been drafted and is included at Appendix 1. The policy is being produced to set out the obligations of the Council and to document how fire safety risk will be managed and mitigated both strategically and operationally. It has been drafted in line with legislation (as referenced in the draft policy); completed fire risk assessments and resulting remedial actions; housing sector best practice; guidance received from external agencies (such as Surrey Fire and Rescue Service) and using knowledge gained from lessons learnt.

3.5 Table 1 summarises the current status of the FRA actions following the activity described above:

Table 1: Summary Position (as of 19 July 2024)	
Total of original actions	3,790
Total where no was action required	777
Action to be taken at next re-investment opportunity	180
Action at decommissioned properties	80
Actions underway	645
Actions completed	1,132
Remaining action total	976

3.6 To date, 1,132 actions have been completed with a further 645 in progress. 777 actions have been closed as no further action is required (mostly duplicate actions). There are currently 976 actions which are yet to start, predominantly works that need to be procured from contractors.

3.7 Table 2 below summarises the remaining actions by the team it is assigned to or where it will be completed by a contractor. Tasks allocated to 'Asset Management' and 'Contractors' relate to specialist works items or repairs that have been instructed or need to be procured. Tasks assigned to 'Compliance' largely relate to certification where the Council has been required to submit evidence to the fire risk assessor (i.e. Gas Safety Certificates). Actions assigned to 'Housing Management' largely relate to the management of communal areas and signage. Tasks allocated to 'Independent Living' relate to non-accessed areas of sheltered housing schemes where the Council needs to facilitate access (i.e. loft space access to facilitate further inspections).

Responsible Team	Not started	Underway	Complete
Asset Management	0	186	55
Compliance	26	7	531
Housing Management	197	67	241
Independent Living	21	14	14
Contractors	732	371	284
Total actions	976	645	1132

3.8 Of the 1,621 actions yet to be completed (in progress and not started), 1,066 are overdue against target timescales in the FRAs with the majority being 6-12 months overdue. The focus continues to be on closing out the remaining 224 high risk actions with the majority of these being in progress.

4.0 Implications

Legal

4.1 The Council has a number of legal duties in respect of fire safety as set out in the Draft Fire Safety Policy at Appendix 1.

Resources (including finance)

4.2 The Council is allocating significant resources and budget to resolving the fire safety actions.

Risk (Corporate Governance)

4.3 Fire safety is an area of considerable risk for the Council. The fire safety remedial actions being undertaken will reduce the risk to resident and the Council. The Housing Fire Safety Policy is intended to reduce, manage, and mitigate fire safety risks in the future.

Scrutiny

4.4 This report provides an opportunity to scrutinise the actions being taken and progress made to address fire safety risks and provide pre-decision scrutiny on future operational policy.

Decision Scope

4.5 The Committee is invited to note the approach and progress made to address fire safety and to provide comments on the Draft Housing Fire Safety Policy.

5.0 Engagement and Consultation

5.1 As set out in the report, work is progressing on developing a resident fire safety communication plan.

5.2 Drop-in events have been arranged at Lakeview Community Centre to discuss cladding issues with the next session planned for 19 September 2024.

REPORT ENDS