CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

# Meeting of the City Council
19 July 2017

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| **Report title** | Fire Safety Management; High Rise Tower Blocks |
| **Referring body** | None |
| **Councillor to present report** | Councillor Peter Bilson |
| **Wards affected** | All |
| **Cabinet Member with lead responsibility** | Councillor Peter Bilson<br>Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing |
| **Accountable director** | Lesley Roberts<br>Strategic Director of Housing<br>and Chief Executive Wolverhampton Homes |
| **Originating service** | Housing Services |
| **Accountable employee(s)** | Shaun Aldis — Director of Operations Wolverhampton Homes<br>Tel — 01902 552956<br>Email — shaun.aldis@wolverhampton homes.org.uk |
| **Report to be/has been considered by** | |

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**Recommendations for noting:**

The Council is asked to note:

The the action being taken following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, London on the 13th June 2017.

## 1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Full Council with detailed information and an overview of the existing high-rise tower block fire safety management regime that Wolverhampton Homes (WH) operates. The report outlines the actions Wolverhampton has taken in response to the dreadful disaster at Grenfell Tower. It also details the level of consultation undertaken to reassure our tenants and key stakeholders. The report also identifies initiatives implemented to further strengthen this regime.

## 2.0 Background

2.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) has a total of 36 high-rise tower blocks which are managed by WH on behalf of CWC. The individual blocks range from 9 -23 storeys in height and have between 33 to 126 units per block. In total, there are circa 2,164 high-rise units of which 58 are leasehold (2.7%). The vast majority of these blocks were built in the 1960's, with some in the early to mid-1970's.
In addition to the 36 high-rise tower blocks Wolverhampton also have an additional 11 blocks of flats that are 6 – 8 storeys inclusive. None of these have any cladding systems. For the purposes of this report these are excluded, however, they still form an integral part of the fire safety management regime. They are excluded as they are not tower blocks and do not share the same characteristics.

2.2 All the blocks are designated as general needs blocks, which means they are occupied by a mixture of families, couples and single people. In 2011, 8 high-rise tower blocks, that had previously been designated as sheltered schemes, were decommissioned and were converted back to general need accommodation. Since then, the tenant profile in these specific blocks has not fundamentally changed and the needs of residents in these blocks through age and mobility etc. remains relatively high.

## 3.0 Tower blocks: structure, renovation and building materials

### Cladding situation

3.1 Initial reporting on the Grenfell fire has focussed primarily on the quality of the cladding used in the recent refurbishment works carried out to the block. Over a number of years both CWC and WH have undertaken considerable refurbishment works to our high-rise tower blocks in Wolverhampton but a direct comparison should not automatically be made to the situation that has occurred in London.

3.2 The type of cladding system used at Grenfell was a 'rain-screen' cladding system formed with a decorative external panel made from an Aluminium Composite Material (ACM). It is important to recognise that there are many different types of 'rain-screen' cladding and 'rain-screen' cladding is not inherently a dangerous product. The issue is the material used to manufacture the external panel which was an ACM, appears to be the cause of the rapid fire spread. It can be confirmed that none of the high-rise tower blocks in Wolverhampton are clad with ACM's.

3.3 Of the 36 high rise tower blocks in Wolverhampton, 18 have received some form of full or partial cladding. Of these, 12 received insulated render cladding that is fixed directly on to the blocks. This type of cladding is very different to 'rain-screen' cladding in that it is not problematic because the render/insulation bonds directly onto the original building façade. Assurance can be given that these blocks do not possess any risk. In addition, they do not have ACM panels as part of the design.

3.4 The remaining 6 blocks do have 'rain-screen' type cladding fitted, but again none of the systems use ACM's. The 6 blocks where 'rain-screen' cladding has been fitted can be found on 2 estates:

a) **Graiseley Estate**: Graiseley Court, Russell Court and Grosvenor Court. These were clad as part of a regeneration programme in 2006/2007.
b) **Heath Town Estate**: Brockfield House, Campion House and Longfield House. These were partially clad (North and South elevations only) in early 1990's as part of an estate renovation programme.

3.5 Of the 18 high-rise tower blocks in Wolverhampton that have received external cladding none have the same system as found at Grenfell Tower. Since the 14th June 2017, in response to Government questions WH has carried out a comprehensive review of all the blocks with external cladding. This has taken into consideration the specifications, product/ manufacturers fire testing certification, working drawings, etc. This exercise has been completed for the high-rise tower blocks located on the following 7 estates:

| Ref | Ward | Tower blocks | Type of Cladding System | Full/ Partial System |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Heath Town | Brockfield House, | 'rain-screen' | Partial |
| | | Campion House | | |
| | | Longfield House | | |
| 2 | Graiseley | Graiseley Court, | 'rain-screen' | Full |
| | | Russell Court | | |
| | | Grosvenor Court | | |
| 3 | Merry Hill | Highfield Court | 'insulated render' | Full |
| | | St Joseph's Court | | |
| | | Pennwood Court | | |
| 4 | Bilston North | Clem Attlee Court | 'insulated render' | Full |
| | | Hugh Gaitskell Court | | |
| | | Winston Churchill Court | | |
| 5 | Wednesfield South | Grosvenor Court | 'insulated render' | Full |
| | | Gregory Court | | |
| | | Lathe Court | | |
| 6 | Heath Town | Wodensfield Tower | 'insulated render' | Full |
| | | William Bentley Tower | | |
| 7 | Ettingshall | Arthur Greenwood Court | 'insulated render' | Full |
| Total | 7 | 18 | | |

3.6 Most of the tower blocks in Wolverhampton are constructed of cast in-situ reinforced concrete, which was originally clad with a variety of materials (typically brick, or concrete panels).

3.7 Over a period of years, some of these high-rise tower blocks have benefited from external refurbishment and both CWC and WH has fitted a range of products as outlined in this report. Under the current UK Building Regulations (Approved Document B), the external walls of high-rise buildings that are 18m tall and higher, should reach a minimum standard of Class 0 (when tested in accordance with the British Standards), or Class B-s3, d2 (or better) if tested under the Euroclass Classification system.

3.8 All the render systems and 'rain-screen' systems achieve or exceed these requirements and the cladding materials have very limited combustibility / spread of flame.

3.9 **On site quality assurance and testing of cladding**
On the 19th June 2017, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) asked Wolverhampton to provide detailed information on all high-rise blocks of flats that had received external cladding. All information was returned within the prescribed deadline by WH. In addition, the DCLG also requested that specific samples of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) panels, like the ones used on Grenfell Tower be sent to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) so that they could be tested. ACM panels are a type of flat panel that consists of two thin aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core, typically between 3 and 7mm thick'. As none of the 36 high-rise tower blocks managed by Wolverhampton Homes have such panels fitted. Therefore, there has been no requirement for testing.

3.10 However, as the 6 blocks at both the Graiseley Estate and Heath Town Estate have a type of 'rain-screen' cladding systems, albeit not ACM, Wolverhampton Homes arranged for the cladding to be inspected on site at both estates to check on the installation. This was undertaken on 28th and 29th June involving a contractor, Building Control, WMFS and WH staff (for the Graiseley inspection, the Fire Officer was unavailable). This was to ensure that the work was of the required quality (that it had been installed to the manufacturer's recommendations and to building regulations including the installation of appropriate fire breaks had been installed.)

3.11 **Graiseley Estate (Graiseley Court, Russell Court and Grosvenor Court)**
WH has received assurances from the manufacturers that their system uses only inert, solid aluminium, which following independent testing has been confirmed to be an "A1 Non-Combustible" fire rating. The cladding panel has a mineral wool insulation behind it, which is also classified as "A1 Non-Combustible". There are both horizontal and vertical firebreaks installed at regular intervals as required by the Building Regulations.

3.12 The manufacturer has confirmed that elsewhere in the country there have been several incidents of severe fires, which have occurred in buildings that have been clad using the same system (as was installed on the Graiseley Estate). In every instance, the fire has been fully and successfully contained and the cladding material has met the fire performance requirements in all respects.

3.13 **Heath Town Estate (Brockfield House, Campion House and Longfield House)**
At Heath Town, the product was also found to be holding up well, given its age, and had been installed in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Fire breaks were at the 8th and 15th floors, in accordance with Building Regulations at the time of installation. Regulations have subsequently been upgraded to require fire breaks at every floor. Panels have been removed for testing and as detailed below are being sent to 2 Government approved testing facilities.

3.14 As previously mentioned, Wolverhampton needs to learn from the results of the Grenfell investigation to assist in deciding whether retrospective fire measures such as sprinklers, are required. However, as Heath Town estate is poised for major refurbishment, WH is currently exploring the feasibility of different types of sprinklers, fire detection systems, and other fire measures: these will be assessed and included if necessary. A range of expert views will be taken, including consultation with WMFS before a final decision is taken. Financial resources have already been identified for emergency measures.

3.15 Whilst there is no requirement for testing the type of external panels that have been used at Graiseley and Heath Town, WH decided to seek further reassurance by having these panels independently tested. This was also requested by the CWC Executive.
The Government approved Building Research Establishment (BRE) testing laboratory advises that only ACM panels are being tested as a priority. At the time of writing the report WH has requested a date from the BRE, however they cannot, and are not willing to give an appointment date when they would be able to accept and test our panels.
Therefore, WH has made additional arrangements and booked samples to be sent to another Government-recommended testing house. These sample were sent by express next day delivery on the 6th July, with specific arrangement being made to undertake the tests as a matter of urgency. It has been confirmed that the testing and results will be made available by the end of July. Clearly it is a case of supply and demand with clear priority being given to ACM testing. WH is currently putting pressure on both testing organisations to accelerate their timelines.

3.16 It can be confirmed that the cladding specified on the City's blocks achieved the standard required under the then relevant fire rules and regulations. It is now apparent that the testing being undertaken is using different, more stringent, criteria, which could produce different results.

3.17 **Announcement in changes to testing procedure, regime and methodology**
On the 6th July, it was announced that the ACM cladding samples that had failed safety tests up to that date would now be subject to further 'large scale' testing. The Government confirmed that a new testing procedure would be adopted that would involve the assembly of a complete cladding system to a height of 9m (30ft). This demonstration wall would then be subjected to a 'severe fire'. This decision was taken after 190 out of 191 inner core samples taken from the ACM panels failed initial combustibility tests.

3.18 The Local Government Association (LGA) have welcomed these changes to the process. This follows questions having been raised concerning the nature, process and

methodology of the testing regime to date after all but one test resulted in a failure. The independent expert panel advising the Government on fire safety has now said that further testing would be carried out as the next step.

3.19 Up until the 6th July the tests only covered the plastic 'core' of the ACM panels, similar to those used on the Grenfell Tower. It is proposed that the new process will replicate and subject a demonstration wall to a 'severe fire in a flat breaking out of a window' and aim to establish whether it would then spread up the outside of the wall via the cladding.

3.20 The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have confirmed the new process will also assess how different types of ACM panels behave with different types of insulation in the event of a fire. In addition, the LGA has reinforced their earlier view that entire cladding panels, the void and the insulation behind them need to be fire tested together as a complete cladding system, rather than just the inner core of one component, the external ACM panel.

3.21 The approach has also been supported by the Fire Industry Association (FIA) confirming that the new test will better inform social housing providers who have ACM 'rain-screen' systems. This type of cladding has been installed in high-rise tower blocks across the country. It is understood, that in light of these latest developments and lack of clarity/advice from the Government the removal of cladding systems at 8 tower blocks in Salford, Greater Manchester has been deferred.

3.22 Again, it can be confirmed that Wolverhampton does not have any ACM external panel 'rain-screen' cladding systems that are referred to under sections (3.13 -3.18). The outcome of these new tests will be closely monitored.

## 4.0 Other council housing stock: structure, renovation and building materials

### 4.1 Low and medium rise properties

Since the 1990's low and medium rise housing have been in receipt of external wall insulation (EWI). Over this period some circa 2,200 low rise properties (houses and bungalows) have been in receipt of this work. In addition, there have been some circa 200 medium rise properties also included. The EWI programmes have used a variety of 'insulated rendered' systems.

4.2 Under the Building Regulations 2-storey flats are treated the same as houses and bungalows. Due to the design, size and complexity of these buildings the fire safety requirements are less in comparison with those applied in high-rise tower blocks. This is because it is much easier in the event of a fire, to escape from a one or two storey property.

4.3 All the CWC's houses, bungalows and flats (of not more than 2-floors), have had an "escape window" installed (one of the casements in a window will open wide enough to allow people to escape through it). In addition to this, whilst it is not mandatory, all 2-storey blocks of flats also have fire doors installed to the flat entrance door (where this is off a communal staircase), which helps to protect the escape route in the event of a fire. In the light of Grenfell Tower, WH proposes to write to all residents through the tenant's

newsletter and website to again confirm the reasons for having these “escape windows” to improve their awareness in the event of a fire. This will be done in conjunction with WMFS.

4.4 Many of these buildings have cladding materials (plastic, render etc.), which are all manufactured in accordance with the British Standards. Under the citywide Decent Homes Programme high quality external composite doors were specified and fitted after being technically evaluated by a stakeholder panel. Depending upon the specific location and property archetype these are either industry approved and tested fire rated doors or standard external quality doors. Where applicable fire certification is held for the manufacture of these doors. This same level of scrutiny and quality assurance continues to date.

4.5 Purpose-built blocks of flats, especially those of three floors and above, require a higher degree of fire safety and incorporate many of the characteristics that are found in tower-blocks, such as fire doors, compartmentation and emergency lighting.

## 5.0 Health and safety framework and governance

5.1 WH operates a very strict health and safety regime, particularly in respect of fire safety. WH has a fire safety policy which details the management processes in place to ensure that the company reduces the risk of fire in any of the properties and buildings it manages on behalf of CWC to an absolute minimum. This is overseen by the WH, Health and Safety Committee. In addition to this there are regular fire safety committee meetings that are held and are attended by the Director of Operations and other senior officers to ensure action and compliance. This meeting is chaired by designated responsible person for fire safety in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Both meetings receive, act upon and closely monitor a comprehensive suite of performance data. In addition, WH Board receives and scrutinises a detailed annual health and safety report.

5.2 Over many years WH have worked very closely with West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) to ensure effective fire safety management and trialled new initiatives. In addition, WH has liaised closely with them in the circulation of key messages to residents since the Grenfell Tower incident.

5.3 **How projects are prepared and delivered within the legislative framework**
Following the implementation of CDM 2015, which governs all construction activity, Wolverhampton Homes reviewed its approach to the delivery of large projects, which included creating a dedicated design team. This ensures that there are members of staff with sufficient levels of experience and capability to fulfil the comprehensive and complex duties, which includes the function of Principal Designer.

Under CDM 2015, the Principal Designer shall:

- plan, manage, monitor and coordinate health and safety in the pre-construction phase of a project
- identify, eliminate or control all foreseeable risks
- provide relevant information to the Principal Contractor to help them plan, manage, monitor and coordinate health and safety in the construction phase

5.4 Fire safety is one of many risks that are considered through the design phase, and detailed technical appraisals are undertaken to assess the suitability of any proposed product for its intended application. In addition to this, before any project commences consultation is undertaken with the Planning Department, Building Control and West Midlands Fire Service. Whenever necessary, the design and specification will be amended to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the final solution.

5.5 The majority of the materials specified for fire protection work are selected from the Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB) List of Approved Fire & Security Products and Services – "The Red Book". (N. B. The LPCB is a trading subsidiary of the BRE).

## 6.0 Fire safety management and fire precaution regime

6.1 Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order and the supporting guidance: Fire Safety in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats published by the LGA provides a detailed set of requirements for managing fire safety in blocks of flats. Wolverhampton Homes complies with this fully and undertakes Fire Risk Assessments and a range of other activities in accordance with this legislation.

6.2 All high-rise tower blocks have an annual fire risk assessment which is undertaken by an external professional third party who is a qualified fire risk assessor. The fire risk assessments include the following elements that are found in the communal areas: -

- Means of Escape
- Fire Detection
- Fire Fighting Equipment
- Fire Doors and Screens
- Fire Stopping
- Lighting
- Safety Signs

6.3 Upon receipt of the fire risk assessments action plans for any identified remedial/ replacement work is collated and all necessary work ordered and completed. The fire risk assessment regime is closely monitored by the Director of Operations personally, and the Chief Executive via the health and safety committee and the fire safety meetings. Overall performance is reported to and monitored by the Board.
Following a number of freedom of information requests, WH took the decision for all high-rise tower block fire risk assessments to be made available on the WH website.

6.4 In addition to the annual fire risk assessment, concierge staff undertake daily visits and fire safety inspections to all high-rise tower blocks. These checks look at and ensure that communal areas are free from risks and to ensure that tenants are complying with their tenancy agreement in terms of not storing personal possessions in communal areas. Wolverhampton Homes operates a 'zero-tolerance' policy. This inspection also covers visual checks of the dry/wet risers and cupboards, damage to fire doors, door closers and glazing, and so on.

6.5 Wolverhampton Homes operates a comprehensive non-domestic asset register that closely manages, monitors and records all certification in terms of the following:

- All dry and wet risers are regularly serviced and maintained by professional third party contractors. This includes undertaking visual and hydraulic testing at mandatory timescales.
- All internal communal areas and stairwells are painted with class 0 fire retardant paint to prevent the spread of fire.
- Periodic checks on the integrity of fire compartmentation: for example, fire stopping
- Emergency lighting, communal electrical installations and lightning conductors are also periodically checked, serviced and maintained.
- The inspection, service and maintenance of the ground-floor bin chute room door 'mechanical fire dampers' that automatically close in the event of a fire in the ground-floor bin chute room.

6.6 In addition to this every flat is fitted with a smoke alarm, with every incidence of fire, however small, being reported by WMFS and considered by WH.

6.7 **Sprinklers**

WH has been working closely with West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) for some years, to identify any specific high-risk situations, where the installation of a sprinkler system is required. To date, where specific high-risk circumstances are found to exist, WH has installed a domestic sprinkler system in the individual's home. Due to the very-high risk of a fire occurring in that individual's home, the sprinkler system helps us to safeguard the life of that person and other residents of the home, or in the block. In addition to this WH has also installed sprinklers in the ground -floor bin chute room areas.

6.8 Sprinkler systems are not fitted in the general communal areas in Wolverhampton high-rise tower blocks, legally, new blocks now require sprinklers, but there is no current legal requirement to retrofit existing blocks. Local authorities and social landlords were asked to consider retrofitting after the Lakanal House fire by Government following Coroner's report (rule 43 letter). WH and CWC jointly considered this carefully in 2014 and decided it did not provide sufficient benefit on its own due to wider fire safety implications. It is understood that very few blocks have been retrofitted across the country. Clearly this may well feature in recommendations emerging from the Grenfell Tower enquiry.

6.9 WH will continue to work very closely with West Midlands Fire Service concerning fire prevention and during the interim period will take advice from a range of experts including WMFS in terms of installing sprinkler/ fire alarm systems into existing high rise tower blocks.

6.10 Clear guidance, will not be available until the findings of the fire investigation has been completed following the Grenfell Tower disaster. It is expected that the Government and coroner will then make recommendations that will result in fundamental changes being made to the fire regulations and fire safety. CWC and WH will then need to act on any changes in the fire regulations and building legislation that will arise from this dreadful disaster and will comply and immediately act on the recommendations that arise.

6.11 At this moment, WH, CWC and WMFS do not know what these changes will be and until these are announced it is impossible to speculate. Should work be commissioned prior to this then it is exceedingly likely that this work may not comply with the new safety regulations. WH will closely monitor this situation especially where capital regeneration work is planned in the interim.

6.12 **Alarms**

Previously designated sheltered blocks had audible alarms fitted and wardens on site to assist residents to evacuate in the event of a fire. These alarms are now reaching the end of their useful life but considering recent events these in the interim will continue to be maintained.

All CWC housing stock have individual smoke alarms fitted.

6.13 **Gas**

It can be confirmed that unlike Grenfell Tower, no high-rise tower blocks within Wolverhampton have mains gas supplies. A number of blocks previously had gas supplies this includes: Wodensfield and William Bentley Towers these were removed as part of the estate regeneration.

6.14 **CCTV**

WH operates CCTV in all our high-rise tower blocks, these are monitored 24/7 by staff in the CCTV central control room who actively monitor all cameras. CCTV staff of course alert emergency services immediately if any incident is identified. Currently, CCTV is limited to the ground floor communal areas and external parts of the blocks. However, this will be reviewed and will form part of the wider high-rise fire safety strategy.

## 7.0 Strategic risk register

7.1 The CWC June 2017, Strategic Risk Register now includes the following: Safety concerns around the City's tower blocks. (reference 27 06/17). The risk description 'Following the recent tragic events at Grenfell Tower in London, there is an urgent need for the Council to ensure that the tower blocks in the City do not face the same risks, and that tenants can be assured of this'. The risk owner is: Lesley Roberts. Cabinet member: Cllr. Peter Bilson.

## 8.0 Communication and reassurance given to tenants and leaseholders

8.1 **Stay put policy**

WH, together with other social landlords across the country has a 'stay put' policy for its high- rise tower blocks, which is endorsed with West Midlands Fire Service. This policy is designed to protect our tenants in the case of a fire within the block. All our flats are designed to withstand the ingress of fire from another flat or communal area. If tenants leave their flats they risk being caught in the fire or they could impede the emergency services who will be using the stairwells to access the scene of the fire.

8.2 West Midlands Fire Service advice has been for tenants to stay put in their flats until and unless they are asked to evacuate by fire service personnel or unless the fire is within their own flat. This advice is based on tower blocks being built to withstand fire for a period and

avoids the danger of mass evacuation down what is often only one communal stairwell. Fire Service reports in the media, and confirmed locally by the WMFS on the 16 June, is that this advice is unchanged. From consultation, it seems doubtful that many residents would be willing to heed the advice at the current time.

8.3 It must be remembered that the "Stay Put" policy has worked effectively for many years. At Grenfell Tower, the ACM panels allowed fire to spread at a significant rate across the outside of the building, which bypassed the compartmentation within the block and in this unique situation "Stay Put" was no longer a viable solution.

8.4 WH undertook an exercise 2-3 years ago with the Fire Service to remind tenants what to do in the event of fire, to check all fire safety notices in blocks and prepared a leaflet and film which was widely commended. There is believed to be a good level of awareness.

8.5 **Fire prevention advice**

Arrangements were made for staff and representatives from the WMFS to visit Graiseley and Heath Town on Monday and Tuesday 19th and 20th June to advise residents about fire prevention and the stay put policy, to offer support and answer/bring back any questions. WH is grateful to Assistant Chief Gary Taylor who has kindly liaised with WH H&S officers over this and access for emergency vehicles. There are excellent working relationships with the service.

8.6 **Fire precautions and fire service checks**

It can be confirmed that between the 19th and 30th June joint site inspections had been undertaken by senior representatives of both WH and WMFS. At the time of writing the report all but 3 of our high-rise tower blocks had been visited understandably this was due to available WMFS resources. The inspections have not identified any significant issues. Any minor actions identified were acted upon as a priority. As part of the visits no issues were raised by the tenants. In fact, it has been put on record by the CWC/WH health and safety officer that WMFS again '*commended Wolverhampton on the overall fire safety management of the blocks'.*

The WMFS were also asked to re-check if vehicle access arrangements were satisfactory although previous discussions with the WMFS about access had not identified any major issues of concern. The recent joint inspections confirmed that '*vehicle access was reviewed and to date no issues were identified. Graiseley estate was discussed as being "tight" for a to access due to the original layout of the road.'* Consequently, it has been requested that the WMFS visit with the hydraulic platform to confirm access. In addition, it has also been requested fire crews to attend blocks out of hours in the appliances due to reports of parking issues outside of normal hours however WMFS do not seem overly concerned.

8.7 An operational audit across all 3 blocks in Graiseley was carried out by the WMFS on 29th June – no major issues were identified during the audit. At the time of writing this report the CE of Wolverhampton Homes has received verbal indications confirming these findings and is waiting a report. Wolverhampton Homes provided all stock condition data relating to fire safety, compliance and certification. Any recommended actions will be carried out

as a priority. The WMFS have been invited to carry out a similar audit on Heath Town as an additional reassurance to residents.

8.8 **Information for residents and other stakeholders**

Residents living in high-rise blocks have had regular updates from Wolverhampton Homes via the website and by individual letter. All residents in high-rise blocks have been advised about the type of cladding used on their blocks to reassure them of their safety, and those living in the blocks with 'rain-screen' cladding have received additional updates. Most recently they have been advised about the on-site testing and they will be sent a further update, as soon as the results have been received. All information sent to residents has included reminders about fire safety. Staff and tenants have been invited to post or telephone their questions so WH can put a running Q&A on the website – this allows issues of concern to be addressed and responded to in real time.

Information will continue to be open, honest and straightforward with questions answered as quickly as possible.

8.9 Pre-advertised visits were carried out by a Fire Officer and one of the Council's Health and Safety officers. This was done as a priority to the blocks in the Graiseley and Heath Town estates, to chat to residents about fire safety and offer face-to-face reassurance. Visits to other high-rise blocks were made in the week beginning 26th June.

8.10 Residents have been reminded about the Fire Service recommended policy of staying put in your flat in the event of a fire, unless the fire is in your flat or you are asked to evacuate. Residents in ex-sheltered blocks and other blocks with fire alarms, are being sent a letter advising them that the alarm is a warning they should be ready to evacuate when advised to do so unless the fire is in their flat. These letters will be followed up by a visit by senior staff for further reassurance.

8.11 To date WH has received 30 questions have been raised by residents on related issues or concerns. WH has responded to all of them and they have been used to compile a list of "questions and answers", that people can view via the website (there is also the facility to raise further questions).

8.12 **Leaseholders**

Under the leasehold agreement, leaseholders are responsible for repairs to their own front doors and the internal fixtures and fittings of the flat: kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems and electrical installations etc. There are currently 56 leasehold flats across the 36 high rise tower blocks. WH offer leaseholder services, many of which take up our offer of fitting fire doors at cost with favourable payment terms. Enforcement action is taken against those who have replaced their doors and are not able to provide appropriate fire certificates. In addition to this we are planning to visit all leaseholder properties to check the installation of smoke alarms. This visit will help WH identify any health and safety risks. Currently WH have limited powers this has been flagged up with MP's in terms of supporting changes to national law that could help support social housing providers in terms of ensuring legal compliance.

## 9.0 Information given to key stakeholders

9.1 Councillors and MPs have been kept informed about all the above actions, including details of our communication to tenants. WFTA have also been kept informed and WH attended their recent meeting to give a verbal update and answer their questions.

9.2 WH has supplied all information requested by the DCLG and will continue to provide any detailed information and as when requested.

## 10.0 Residential tower blocks managed by other organisations

10.1 There are 2 high-rise tower blocks within the City that were built and owned by CWC but are now managed by others:

- Hampton View on the Heath Town Estate. This block is leasehold and is currently managed by Sanctuary Housing. It has been confirmed from Sanctuary that the cladding system does not comprise of ACM's. As the block is under a leasehold agreement with CWC it is proposed that further discussions are arranged between Sanctuary, CWC and WH.
- St.Ceclia's on the Hickman Estate. This block was sold freehold and is privately owned. WH has recently received confirmation that the cladding is not ACM.

10.2 **Liberty Heights Student Accommodation**
The private owners of Liberty Heights confirmed, following detailed examination:

- The 25-storey tower block has no ACM cladding panels, there are detection systems, alarms and sprinklers in place and 24 hour security – the block is considered fully fire safe.

- The 8 and 10 storey blocks have 20% ACM panels. Although there are a range of detection systems and precautionary measures in place, the owners felt as a fail-safe measure they should relocate the students in residence to other suitable accommodation pending further consideration. As it is a holiday period, it was felt that the numbers made this relatively easy. Having liaised with WMFS this was implemented and was reported in the Express and Star on the 4th July 2017.

## 11.0 Non -residential tower blocks: other Corporate Buildings and Schools

11.1 In relation to its wider portfolio, the Council's Corporate Landlord completed a status and adequacy review of all fire risk assessments and associated management plans for all its non-housing assets in Autumn 2016. Consequently a programme of high priority actions were identified and completed by April 2017, with medium priority actions due for completion by September 2017. Low priority actions are being addressed within work plans of existing staff resources.

11.2 With reference to schools the Department for Education have launched an online survey to form a view on the safety of school buildings. The survey has been completed and submitted to the DfE on Friday 30 June 2017.

11.3 The survey covers all school buildings that the Council's has responsibility for (Academy Trusts and Voluntary Aided schools have been requested to complete their own surveys) and pays particular attention to buildings that are four storey or above and/or have residential accommodation.

11.4 For schools delivered under the Building School for the Future programme contact is being made with the Council's Local Education Partnership responsible for their delivery, to obtain assurance that all appropriate surveys and measures are in place.

11.5 Corporate Landlord and Health and Safety have commissioned priority Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) for 10 schools in the city where a FRA's are required or an update assessment needs to be carried out. All other LA schools have the appropriate assessments in place.

11.6 Reassurance on fire safety and building compliance for all schools refurbished or rebuilt as part of the BSF programme has been requested from the Local Education Partnership.

## 12.0 Financial implications

12.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, additional fire checks and the testing carried out has been met by Wolverhampton Homes existing revenue budgets. At present sprinklers and fire alarm systems are not required to be retrospectively fitted throughout high rise tower blocks, although it is expected that this will change. At this stage, it is not possible to predict the cost of any capital works that will arise and over what period additional capital expenditure will be required. This will also depend on how the industry can respond in terms of supply and demand.

12.2 The Capital Budget Outturn 2016/17 including Q1 Monitoring 2017/18 report has requested delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing in consultation with the Strategic Director for Place to approve urgent programmes of work to respond to health and safety issues and reprofile existing projects accordingly. Therefore when the need arises for additional capital works to improve fire safety on the high rise blocks the council will be able to respond quickly to approve the expenditure. [JM/10072017/D]

## 13.0 Legal implications

13.1 It is essential that all work undertaken meets the required legislative, mandatory and statutory requirements. Further updates and any significant new information will be reported to Council, Cabinet and Councillors more widely as required. [RB/07072017/Y]

## 14.0 Equalities implications

14.1 The contents of this report do not have any direct equality implications. However, following the Grenfell Tower fire the disaster has raised serious concerns relating to a range of inequality and social issues.

14.2 As part of the high-rise fire safety strategy a review of the lettings policy on who can be allocated and remain in high rise properties will need to be considered. This will be determined by the stay put policy and/or evacuation procedures.

## 15.0 Environmental implications

15.1 The installation of external cladding to high-rise tower blocks has been a major feature of major refurbishment programmes for 2 key reasons:

- to improve the appearance and appeal of the blocks as well the street scene and wider estate
- improving energy efficiency measures for the block and increase insulation and help residents who may be suffering from fuel poverty.

## 16.0 Human resources implications

16.1 There are no immediate HR implications arising from this report.

## 17.0 Corporate landlord implications

17.1 As detailed in the main body of the report.

## 18.0 Schedule of background papers

18.1 Members Briefing Paper 19th June 2017
Members Briefing Paper 30th June 2017