

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No.10

MEETING: 18 NOVEMBER 2019

SUBJECT: GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY: PHASE 1 REPORT

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE STRATEGIC FINANCE OFFICER AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview to members of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report, published on the 30 October 2019.
- 1.2 It is important to note that at the point of writing, a full and detailed assessment of the report and its recommendations and the potential implications these will have on the Authority has not been undertaken. These implications and associated actions will be the subject of a more detailed future report to Authority.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Inquiry is based around the events that took place on the 17 June 2017, when sadly 72 people lost their lives due to an unprecedented fire which engulfed the Grenfell Tower high rise residential building in Kensington, London.
- 2.2 The Inquiry is investigating a range of issues that have been separated into two phases. Phase one focuses on the factual narrative of the events on the evening, the emergency response, and the process of the recent refurbishment that had been carried out on the Tower.
- 2.3 Phase two will focus on the decisions made with regards to the refurbishment of the tower, the impact of the refurbishment on the fire and the relationship between the residents of Grenfell Tower, the Council and the Tenant Management Organisation ("TMO").

3 PHASE ONE REPORT

- 3.1 The phase one report encompasses the following six areas:
- The building itself and the organisation of the London Fire Brigade ("LFB");
 - A detailed narrative of the fire and the steps taken in response;
 - The inquiry's conclusions about the origin of the fire and analysis of the response to it by LFB and other emergency services;

- Tributes paid by those who lost their lives in the fire;
- Recommendations on the findings of the inquiry, and;
- An introduction to phase two of the inquiry.

4 HEADLINE FINDINGS

- 4.1 The Inquiry concluded that fire originated from an electrical fault in flat 16, located on the fourth floor of the tower. The fire entered the external cladding before firefighters first entered the flat to tackle the kitchen fire. The fire within the kitchen was foreseeable.
- 4.2 The fire progressed rapidly up the Aluminium Composite Material (“ACM”) cladding on the east side of the tower, before spreading to other sides of the building at the top. The presence of insulation boards beneath the ACM panels contributed to the rate at which the fire spread.
- 4.3 A number of key fire protection measures inside the tower failed and as a result the fire successfully entered other flats inside the building.
- 4.4 The external walls of the building failed to comply with building regulations and actively promoted the spread of fire. The report notes that phase two of the inquiry will look at responsibility for the redesign of the building.
- 4.5 LFB’s preparation and planning for a tower fire such as Grenfell was ‘gravely inadequate’. Experienced officers had received no training in combustible cladding and officers failed to recognise the need for an evacuation and how to organise one.
- 4.6 LFB’s reliance on the ‘stay put’ advice should have been questioned after the extent of the fire became clear. An earlier decision to evacuate could have resulted in fewer fatalities.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS OF AREAS FOR CHANGE

- 5.1 The chairman of the Inquiry, Sir Martin Moore-Bick has made a series of recommendations for change in the phase one report that are summarised below, the executive summary of the Inquiry report is provided in Appendix A, for further detail.
- 5.2 **Use of combustible materials**
 - 5.2.1 Sir Martin said the original fire in the kitchen was no more than an ordinary kitchen fire that spread to the cladding because of ‘the proximity of combustible materials to the kitchen windows’.
 - 5.2.2 He said this is a matter that ‘it would be sensible’ for owners of other high-rise buildings to check.

- 5.2.3 He stated he would ‘add his voice’ to those who have expressed concern about the slow pace of removal work for more than 400 other tall buildings in England with aluminium composite material cladding.
- 5.2.4 A total of 97 buildings in the social housing sector and 168 in the private sector have not yet seen the work complete. Sir Martin said the work must be completed ‘as vigorously as possible’.
- 5.2.5 He said particular attention should be paid to decorative features, given the crucial role played by the architectural crown at Grenfell in spreading the fire around the building.
- 5.2.6 Given the decision to ban combustible materials on new buildings last year, he did not call for further restrictions on their use.

5.3 Testing and certification of materials

- 5.3.1 Sir Martin said this is an issue that will be investigated ‘early in phase two’, along with an assessment of ‘whether the current guidance on how to comply with the building regulations is sufficiently clear and reliable’.
- 5.3.2 He added the inquiry would investigate whether a ‘prescriptive’ regime of regulation was necessary. However, as these issues have not yet been examined by the inquiry he did not make any recommendations.

5.4 Fire service: knowledge and understanding of materials in high-rise buildings

- 5.4.1 Sir Martin raised concern that ‘more junior’ firefighters were not aware of the danger of cladding fires, and that LFB was unaware of the combustible materials used to refurbish Grenfell Tower. He therefore recommended:
- That the owner and manager of every high-rise residential building is required by law to provide details of external walls and the materials used to the local fire and rescue service, and inform them of any changes;
 - To ensure that all fire and rescue service personnel at all levels understand the risk of cladding fires and how to recognise when they occur.

5.5 Section 7(2)(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (“FRSA”)

- 5.5.1 Sir Martin was concerned that inspections of the tower by the fire and rescue service prior to the fire were not enough to meet their responsibilities under the FRSA. He recommended:
- A revision of the guidance for the LFB, and training for all officers above the rank of crew manager in inspecting high-rise buildings.

5.6 Plans

5.6.1 Sir Martin highlighted that a lack of plans did not 'unduly hamper' fire services at Grenfell, as each floor was laid out in the same way. However, he warned that another building with a more complex layout could pose problems. He recommended:

- That owners and managers of high-rise residential buildings are required by law to provide paper and electronic versions of building plans of all high-rises to local fire services, and;
- To ensure the building contains a premises information box, including a copy of floor plans and information about firefighting lifts.
- All fire and rescue services are able to receive and store electronic plans and that they are made available to incident commanders and control room managers.

5.7 Communication between the control room and the incident commander

5.7.1 While guidance calls for a 'free flow' of information between a fire service control room and the commanding officer on the ground, that often does not happen. Sir Martin therefore recommended:

- A review of policies by the LFB on this matter, including training for all officers who could serve as incident commanders and senior control room officers;
- A dedicated communications link between the senior officer and the incident commander.

5.8 Lifts

5.8.1 Firefighters were unable to use a mechanism that allows them to take control of the lifts on the night of the fire, hampering their progress and meaning residents could still use the lifts, 'in some cases with fatal consequences'.

5.8.2 Sir Martin therefore recommended:

- That the owner and manager of every high-rise residential building be required by law to carry out regular inspections of any lift required for use by firefighters and the mechanism that allows them to take control of it.

5.9 Emergency calls

5.10 Even allowing for the pressure of the night, Sir Martin said that fire survival guidance calls were not handled in an 'appropriate or effective way'. He therefore recommended:

- Amending of policies and training for control room officers;
- That all fire services develop policies for multiple fire survival guidance calls;
- Electronic systems to record and display calls;
- A policy for managing a transition from 'stay put' to 'get out' and training for call handlers in delivering this change of advice.

5.11 **Command and control**

5.12 Sir Martin said firefighters too frequently 'acted on their own initiative', resulting in a duplication of effort. He called for better policies to ensure:

- Better control of training and deployment;
- Information is obtained from crews after they have deployed.

5.13 **Equipment**

5.13.1 Sir Martin made recommendations for improvements to fire service equipment, including radios and the command support system, namely:

- That the LFB urgently take steps to obtain equipment that enables firefighters wearing helmets and breathing apparatus to communicate with the bridgehead effectively, including when operating in high-rise buildings;
- That urgent steps be taken to ensure that the command support system is fully operative on all command units and that crews are trained in its use.

5.14 **Evacuation**

5.14.1 The Inquiry concluded that there were no plans to evacuate Grenfell Tower available. Sir Martin recommended:

- The development of national guidelines for carrying out partial or total evacuations of high-rise residential buildings, including protecting fire access routes and procedures for evacuating people who require assistance;
- All fire and rescue services develop policies for partial or total evacuation of high rise residential buildings;
- Owners and managers be required to draw up and keep under review evacuation plans, with copies provided to local fire and rescue services and placed in an information box on the premises;
- All high-rise residential buildings be equipped with facilities to enable the sending of an evacuation signal to the whole or a selected part of the building;

- Owners and managers be required by law to prepare a personal emergency evacuation plan (“PEEP”) for residents who may struggle to do so personally, with information about them stored in the premise’s information box;
- All fire and rescue services be equipped with smoke hoods to help evacuate residents down smoke-filled stairs.

5.15 Personal fire protection

5.15.1 Sir Martin decided not to issue a recommendation that individual flats be provided with fire extinguishers or fire blankets, noting concerns that this could encourage residents to fight fires rather than escape and call the emergency services.

5.16 Sprinkler Systems

5.16.1 Noting the recommendation from the coroner investigating the Lakanal House fire that the use of sprinklers be encouraged, Sir Martin said that some of his experts had ‘urged me to go a step further and to recommend such systems be installed in all existing high-rise buildings’. He added that sprinklers have ‘a very effective part to play’ in an overall scheme of fire safety, but that he had not yet heard evidence about their use. He said that he could make not recommendations at this stage, but that he would consider the matter in phase two.

5.17 Internal signage

5.17.1 Floor numbers in the tower were not clearly marked and markings were not updated when the floor numbers changed following the refurbishment. Sir Martin said that all high-rise residential buildings should have floors clearly marked in a prominent place, which would be visible in low light or smoky conditions. Given that not all residents of Grenfell could read fire information signs, he said this should now be provided in a means that all residents can understand.

5.18 Fire doors

5.18.1 The Inquiry concluded that it is apparent that ‘ineffective fire doors allowed smoke and toxic gases to spread through the building more quickly than should have been possible’, and that missing self-closers played an important role.

5.18.2 The Inquiry recommended:

- An urgent inspection of fire doors in all buildings containing separate dwellings, whether or not they are high rises;
- A legal requirement on the owner or manager of these buildings to check doors at least every three months to ensure self-closing devices are working effectively

5.19 Co-operation between emergency services

5.19.1 There was a lack of communication between each emergency service at Grenfell, with each declaring a major incident at different times without telling each other. Sir Martin recommended several changes to ensure better communication in the future, namely:

- That each emergency service must communicate the declaration of a Major Incident to all other Category 1 Responders as soon as possible;
- That on the declaration of a Major Incident clear lines of communication must be established as soon as possible between the control rooms of the individual emergency services;
- That a single point of contact should be designated within each control room to facilitate such communication;
- That a 'METHANE' message should be sent as soon as possible by the emergency service declaring a Major Incident.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 After the Grenfell Tower fire, the Authority completed a programme of work which involved working with all high-rise residential property owners, managers and residents across the Authority area. Since the incident, this activity has resulted in corrective actions similar to many of the recommendations being undertaken or already in progress.

6.2 However, in light of the publication of the Inquiry recommendations, further work will be required, including working with partners and local authorities, to ensure that this risk remains as low as reasonably practicable. This activity is being coordinated by the internal Operational Assurance Group that will provide further updates of the position once the full impact of the recommendations has been assessed and the corrective actions progress.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are likely to be significant financial implications in respect of implementing the recommendations of the Inquiry. A further update of the position will be reported once the full impact of the recommendations has been assessed.

8 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are likely to be equality and fairness implications in respect of the recommendations including engagement of residents and their respective housing management organisations. These implications will be subject to a full equality impact assessment and reported to Authority when fully understood.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As some recommendations have the potential to impact directly on a range of service delivery aspects, the full impact in terms of health and safety are being carefully assessed. A further update of the position will be reported once the full impact of the recommendations is known.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Acknowledge the contents of this report
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report Overview
Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Full Report