

DECISION-MAKER:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE		
SUBJECT:	TOWER BLOCK SAFETY		
DATE OF DECISION:	10 AUGUST 2017		
REPORT OF:	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ADULT CARE		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
NOT APPLICABLE	
BRIEF SUMMARY	
This paper provides an update on the steps being taken by the Council, with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum, to provide assurance that the Council's 20 residential high-rise buildings are safe, following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in London on 14 June 2017.	
RECOMMENDATIONS:	
(i)	That the Committee notes the steps being taken to provide assurance that the Council's 20 residential high-rise buildings are safe.
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has requested an update on tower block safety, to include fire risk and emergency planning.
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
2.	No alternative options have been considered and rejected.
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
3.	The day after the Grenfell Tower disaster, an officer group was established to coordinate the Council's response (following an initial meeting of officers and the Cabinet Member on the day itself). The group initially met weekly and is now meeting fortnightly to agree and monitor delivery of an action plan. The group is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer (or Service Director, Adults Housing and Communities in his absence) and comprises relevant Service Leads and technical experts from across the council and includes the Community Safety Delivery Manager from Hampshire Fire and Rescue

	Service.
4.	The group agreed a joint inspection programme of all the council's high rise (over 18m/6 storey) accommodation with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, which has been completed. These visits have provided assurance that fire safety risks are being appropriately managed and a programme to address minor issues arising from the inspections will be agreed by 31 August 2017.
5.	Immediate action was taken to establish that none of the council's high-rise accommodation is clad with Aluminium Composite Material (ACM), the type implicated in the Grenfell Tower fire. The External Wall Insulation (EWI) system in the council's blocks improved through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) schemes (Albion Towers, Shirley Towers, Sturminster House, Dumbletons Towers, Hightown Towers, Meredith Towers, Havre Towers, Rotterdam Towers, Hampton Towers, Oslo Towers and Copenhagen Towers) uses Rockwool insulation. This is described in technical guidance as having "exceptional fire performance – non-combustible". The guidance also states, "these products will not contribute to the growth of a fire including the fully developed stage". It is rated as class A1, non-combustible. The EWI system is render-based and is known as Alsecco Ecomin 300 EWI. This is rated as class A2, which is also classified as non-combustible. There is no cavity between the insulation product and render, which may have been a factor in the Grenfell Tower fire. The Council was not required to submit any of the EWI materials used in Southampton to the Building Research Establishment (BRE), as they did not meet the criteria for testing.
6.	Communications with tenants, residents, Members, stakeholders and the media have taken place in accordance with a communications plan agreed by the officer group, which includes representatives from the Communications Team, who have liaised with their counterparts at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service accordingly. Reassurance letters were hand-delivered to tenants of high rise blocks with EWI fitted or planned, within two days of the Grenfell Tower fire and letters have also now been delivered to all other blocks. This information has been complemented by media releases and a list of frequently asked questions published on the Council's website, which has been promoted at community meetings and via the council's social media feeds. Three email updates have been provided for all Members and a special briefing was held on 4 July 2017, to which all Members were invited. Group Leaders have also been kept updated. A dedicated email address has been set up for all fire safety enquiries – fire.safety@southampton.gov.uk
7.	There has been regular liaison with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Local Government Association (LGA), with all requests for information being provided in accordance with tight deadlines. The DCLG has thanked the Council for its timely and comprehensive responses.
8.	A series of four community reassurance meetings have been held for tenants and residents in partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, in Weston, Thornhill, the central area and Millbrook. The feedback received is that participants left feeling reassured after watching a short video demonstrating the non-combustible nature of Rockwool insulation, finding out

	more about the type of insulation used and the sprinkler programme, and speaking to housing and fire safety experts.
9.	On 20 June 2017, the council announced a rolling programme to install sprinkler systems in all its tower blocks. Work to install sprinkler systems at Albion Towers, Sturminster House and Shirley Towers is underway, having previously been agreed following the fire in Shirley Towers in 2010. These three blocks had already been prioritised because of their design. The next three tower blocks to have sprinkler systems installed will be Canberra Towers, Millbrook Towers and Redbridge Towers. These have been prioritised because they are the tallest and have a single staircase. The intention is to start work in these blocks later this year. The programme for the remaining blocks will be confirmed in due course. Dave Curry, Chief Fire Officer of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, has recommended that sprinklers be retrofitted to all tower blocks. All actions in the post inquest review action plan following the Shirley Towers fire in 2010 have been completed, apart from the installation of sprinklers.
10.	In partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, a mobile unit was used at Albion Towers to demonstrate the operation of the sprinkler system being installed. Ward Members, the media and residents attended various demonstrations. The demonstrator unit helped to show that the system being installed is designed to activate in a highly localised way, which effectively extinguishes a fire while minimising water damage. The same demonstration also took place at Shirley Towers.
11.	The Council has a four-year contract with 3S Fire Ltd, which is the wholly-owned trading arm of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, to manage and monitor the fire risk assessment process for all council properties, including its high-rise residential blocks. 3S Fire subcontract Capita (Health and Safety Services) to support delivery, which means the Council can monitor compliance across its entire property portfolio and can be confident that there is a 'suitable and sufficient' full fire risk assessments in place for all its premises. All of the council's 20 high rise blocks are rated as category A (highest risk) buildings within its portfolio and all of these properties have had a full fire risk assessment. 3S Fire and Capita assessors are competent, qualified and suitably experienced to carry out fire risk assessments on buildings of all risk profile types. All Category A assessors are qualified to Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) level 4 or above and have extensive fire engineering experience. These assessments are all up to date and are currently being reviewed to ensure any outstanding actions are being addressed.
12.	Following the events at Grenfell Tower, the council has carried out an initial review of its evacuation advice, taking into account the findings from the fire risk assessments and advice from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. The advice remains unchanged – if the fire is in your flat, or a neighbour's flat, then you should evacuate, closing the flat's front door (a fire door) behind you. Otherwise, the advice is to "stay put" in your flat unless advised otherwise by the fire service. If residents did try to evacuate they would impede the Fire Service from getting to the source of the fire as quickly as possible e.g. blocking stairwells and corridors. Residents are safer in their flats due to the

	<p>compartmentalisation of the flats and the other fire safety measures in the communal areas i.e. flat front doors give 30 minutes protection with an additional 30 minutes provided by fire doors in corridors and stairwells. There have been two minor fires in the council's tower blocks since the Grenfell Tower fire and the "stay put" advice was followed, which supported a swift and effective resolution of the incidents by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.</p>
13.	<p>A further workshop has been arranged with 3S Fire to review the evacuation advice and all other policies relating to fire safety in the Council's high rise residential accommodation, including signage, fire alarms, drills, inspection frequency and schedules, information and advice given to new and existing tenants etc. There is nothing to suggest at this stage that current policies are not fit for purpose, but a full review is considered prudent. These policies and the council's approach in general will be kept under review, in particular, in the light of any findings arising from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.</p>
14.	<p>In addition to the actions outlined above, the Council has a strong track record of working with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service on a regular basis, including involvement in major projects. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarisation visits for fire crews to flats in tower blocks, particularly the "scissor" blocks with split level flats e.g. Shirley Towers • Guidance on the prioritisation of the sprinkler installation programme • Community reassurance visits and home fire safety checks for tower block residents • Training and familiarisation visits to tower blocks, including for new firefighter recruits – connecting to dry risers / running out hoses etc. • Joint work on referral system for "vulnerable" persons who may present a fire risk e.g. hoarders • Fire safety events which have, and will, take place outside of blocks giving reassurance to residents.
15.	<p>Housing Management have looked at the advice that is given to potential new tenants when they view the property they have been allocated – there is advice included regarding the Council's stay put policy. A further review of sign up information, settling in visit information, and block signage currently taking place.</p>
16.	<p>Any remaining gas supplies (other than to communal boilers) to individual flats in tower blocks have been identified and support is being given to replace gas appliances with electric, enabling the gas supply to be disconnected.</p>
17.	<p>The Local Resilience Forum has convened regular meetings of the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) and Recovery Working Group (RWG), to coordinate actions across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in response to the Grenfell Fire disaster, to support effective communication between all agencies involved and to review emergency preparedness. Using established and well-rehearsed procedures, an emergency rest centre was put on standby to support the evacuation of residents of a housing association property in Southampton, which had been identified as having cladding containing Aluminium Composite Material. An evacuation was deemed to be</p>

	unnecessary following a joint inspection by council officers and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service in accordance with guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the rest centre was stood down. A record of the Common Operating Picture (COP) and associated emergency planning actions is maintained on the Resilience Direct system, which is accessed and updated by council officers and other relevant agencies.
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RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

18.	Funding for installation of sprinklers in three properties – Albion Towers, Shirley Towers and Sturminster House – has been approved as part of this year’s Housing Capital Programme. The Tenants Resources Group has been consulted on revisions to the Housing Capital Programme to allow for installation of sprinkler systems in the next three properties – Canberra Towers, Millbrook Towers and Redbridge Towers – and this will be considered by the Council Capital Board in due course. The programme for installing sprinklers in the remaining blocks is currently being scoped and fully costed.
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Property/Other

19.	There are no further implications in addition to those detailed in the body of the report.
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LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

20.	Not applicable.
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Other Legal Implications:

21.	None.
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RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

22.	The Council’s Management Team has endorsed the inclusion of fire safety in high rise accommodation as a specific risk in the corporate risk register to ensure that the necessary assurance is obtained that robust arrangements are in place to mitigate risk.
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POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southampton City Council Strategy 2016-2020 – supporting delivery of the following key outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People in Southampton live safe, healthy independent lives - Southampton is an attractive modern city, where people are proud to live and work • Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
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KEY DECISION?	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	BARGATE, BEVOIS, BITTERNE, MILLBROOK, REDBRIDGE, SHIRLEY,

		WOOLSTON
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>		
Appendices		
1.	None	
Documents In Members' Rooms		
1.	None	
Equality Impact Assessment		
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out.		No
Privacy Impact Assessment		
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to be carried out.		No
Other Background Documents		
Other Background documents available for inspection at: Civic Centre or available online at www.southampton.gov.uk		
Title of Background Paper(s)		Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainability to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (10 March 2016): Improving Fire Safety in the Council's High-Rise Accommodation http://www.southampton.gov.uk/modernGov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=123&MId=3070&Ver=4	Not applicable