

CORPORATE ISSUES AND REFORM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday 19 November 2019

Subject: Update on the activity of the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service High Rise Team

Report of: Paul Dennett, Mayor of Salford, Chair of the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force, Jim Wallace, Chief Fire Officer, Tony Hunter, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chair of the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The Purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force and the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service High Rise Team in regard to high rise residential buildings in Greater Manchester and its contribution nationally in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is requested to:

- 1.** Note the contents of the report and support the current approach for activities which support the safety of residents and ensure ongoing activity of the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force.
- 2.** Note the positive contribution made by both the Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force and the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service High Rise Team.
- 3.** Note the challenges ahead for Greater Manchester and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service following the release of the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 Report.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Tony Hunter, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Email: hunteraw@manchesterfire.gov.uk

Tel: 07734275772

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Greater Manchester High Rise Task Force (GMHRTF)

The GMHRTF was set up following a Mayoral Summit on the 25 June 2017, with the purpose of overseeing the response in Greater Manchester (GM) to the fire at Grenfell Tower. On the 29 September 2017 an Update on High Rise Buildings was provided to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority by the Paul Dennett, Mayor of Salford, the Chair of the GMHRTF. That paper set out the scope of the GMHRTF, its aims and objectives, which included:

The scope of the GMHRTF is:

To consider the existing state of fire safety measures within all residential high rise buildings across Greater Manchester, i.e. those residential buildings which extend to six floors and above. Based on this consideration, develop a methodology to address any identified shortcomings in those fire safety measures. Provide ongoing reassurance to residents of their continued safety.

The GMHRTF aims are:

To bring together those with responsibility for providing and managing fire safety arrangements in high rise residential buildings and those responsible for providing advice, guidance, support and enforcement in order to;

- Provide assurance to all residents that their homes are safe as quickly as possible
- Provide assurance to developers, owners, managers and regulators that robust systems are in place to secure the best possible approach to fire safety; including promoting and sharing best practice
- Identify issues to contribute to the national public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower
- To provide a response to the findings and subsequent report from the national public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower

The GMHRTFs objectives are:

- To identify and secure appropriate resources, from a range of partners, to deliver the work of the GM Residential High Rise Taskforce
- To gather and assess all available information that will inform the risk profile of high rise residential buildings in Greater Manchester (GM)
- To identify those buildings where external cladding systems have been installed (regardless of the reason for installation); and determine the type of cladding system, its suitability (in the context of regulatory requirement and in view of national and international experience of cladding fires), and the approval process for selection, installation, ongoing maintenance and impact on the fire strategy for the building.
- Develop and deliver a prioritised approach to the inspection of all high rise residential buildings across GM, including fire protection of common parts of buildings, which is based on risk and involves all relevant agencies

- Develop and deliver a risk based approach to the delivery of reassurance advice to all residents across GM, including visits by operational firefighters to carry out an initial assessment of each building, gather risk information and familiarise themselves with firefighting facilities
- Providing a consistent approach to advising responsible persons regarding their statutory obligations and best practice, including those measures necessary to assure themselves that all necessary passive and active fire safety provisions are effectively in place
- Developing a clear understanding of who the responsible person(s) is/are in relation to each building and to support current and future communications by producing and maintaining a register of those responsible for high rise premises
- Ensure that all Greater Manchester authorities have in place adequate emergency preparedness and response arrangements
- Identify relevant issues and contribute to the national public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower, including matters relating to building regulations, fire spread from an external fire to and between fire compartments in a building, quality assurance of fire safety related work, etc.
- Provide a response to the findings and subsequent report of the national public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower
- Ensure that relevant findings from the national public enquiry are incorporated into a GM approach to assurance regarding fire safety of existing and future buildings
- Identify and implement suitable methods of ensuring the involvement of fire experts at a planning and/or pre-planning stage for all new builds and future building conversions in all GM districts
- Explore potential avenues to support the installation of residential sprinklers in all residential high rise buildings
- Develop consistent Fire Safety guidance for use by all stakeholders involved in the provision of residential accommodation in high rise premises.
- To identify capital and revenue funding opportunities to support the delivery of the objective of the taskforce
- To deliver the work of the taskforce in ways that promotes and supports economic growth within Greater Manchester

The GMHRTF initially met fortnightly and this has now reduced to six weekly meetings which are attended by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), representatives of local authorities, housing providers, universities, utility companies and representatives of managing agents for privately owned blocks of flats.

The GMHRTF developed a number of task groups/cells to carry out focused work and the majority of these are led by GMFRS. These include:

The Technical Cell, tasked with developing proposals for short term measures to mitigate the risk from external cladding, working with the Finance and Procurement Cell to minimise the costs of fire safety works for all housing providers and supporting the Communications Cell, with the development of the 'Stay Safe' message. The Technical Cell has now been joined with the GM Social Landlords Technical Cell.

The Legal Cell, considers the extent of the legislative framework to inform both the GMFRS response and also to inform conversations with Government. The Legal Cell has, with the Greater Manchester Private Sector Housing Group, produced principles for enforcing fire safety in high rise buildings and undertaken a GMHRTF event, considering the final report from the Hackitt Review in order to produce and submit a GMHRTF response to the report.

The Finance and Procurement Cell, has undertaken an analysis of the potential costs to GM of carrying out essential fire safety works, promoted access to the Procure Plus framework for housing providers and managing agents and developed a bespoke Research Cell, which is looking at further more detailed analysis of the wider consequences.

The Communications Cell, is led by GMFRS through a dedicated Communications Officer and coordinates activity across housing providers to ensure a consistent message, manages and responds to media requests, supports the GMHRTF in promoting and delivering residents meetings and has led on the development and delivery of 'Stay Safe' messages in addition to supporting the development of a wide range of correspondence.

Stay Safe

The 'Stay Safe' message has been developed in conjunction with social landlords as a response to concerns of residents in the immediate aftermath of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire about the concept of 'Stay Put'. It is a more developed safety message which ensures residents are reassured that in most circumstances they are safest remaining in their flat, but should leave if there is any evidence of smoke or fire or if they feel unsafe. The Stay Safe message is being utilised by social landlords across their high rise blocks and has formed the basis of a general fire safety video co-produced by a number of landlords and filmed at Bury Training and Safety Centre.

The HRTF has and continues to be recognised by a number of national bodies including Local Authority Building Control, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and by officials at Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as an exemplar of good practice.

Residents Survey

A survey of residents living in high rise buildings was undertaken over the summer and utilised as part of the GMHRTF response to the Government's consultation on Building a Safer Future. The survey was subsequently extended until the start of September and a final report is being prepared.

GMFRS High Rise Team

A dedicated GMFRS High Rise Team was created at the end of May 2018, to ensure there was a targeted focus on following up the initial inspections of all high rise buildings undertaken immediately following the fire at Grenfell Tower.

Unlike some Fire and Rescue Services, the approach in GM has not been restricted to reactive inspections of high rise buildings with confirmed Aluminum Composite Material (ACM) cladding.

Critically, all cladding systems are being considered and where there is a risk of external fire spread action is required. This has involved a full compliance inspection of the building and requiring the responsible person to take action, in line with national guidance produced by NFCC or their own risk assessments.

The initial priority for High Rise Team was to build on the inspections undertaken and carry out detailed assurance visits in relation to those blocks operating with 'interim measures', which is where the buildings evacuation strategy had been changed from 'stay put'. In addition to this the High Rise Team carry out assurance visits to ensure those arrangements were effective in ensuring the safety of residents.

The current number of blocks where interim measures are required is currently 79. The total number of buildings affected is higher than this but the majority of social housing blocks affected have now been remediate. Of the buildings currently subject to interim measures 32 are buildings that have non-compliant cladding systems which are not ACM, but pose a risk to residents. There are now only 22 buildings where information about the external wall system has not been provided. In addition for a number of buildings information about the external wall system has been obtained but a detailed assessment by a competent person (for example a fire engineer) is required and there is limited capacity in industry to meet the current demand and there may be further cases where a change to the evacuation strategy is required through the use of interim measures.

The Team continues to re-inspect buildings where works were identified as being required not related to the external wall system and where all necessary work has been undertaken these cases are closed and written confirmation is provided to the housing provider, along with clear recommendations for the ongoing management of the building and a letter is provided for distribution to residents.

The High Rise Team supports social landlords in ongoing consultation with residents on retrofitting sprinklers in their high rise buildings, including attendance at residents meetings and drop-in events and is working towards hosting an event for residents, which will include a demonstration of sprinklers in operation. The Team continues to promote the use of Safe and Well visits to residents in both the social and private sector and works with the local community safety teams, to target particular blocks where appropriate.

The High Rise Team contribute significantly in supporting Mayoral involvement in relation to cladding replacement works, carrying out regular briefings drafting correspondence to Ministers and residents, supporting the Mayor at public meetings, ensuring commitments are followed up and liaising with interested parties in relation to cladding replacement programmes.

National Work

GMFRS is embedded in the work being carried out by NFCC and others to inform the national response to Grenfell and this is delivered in a number of ways. The High Rise Team have built effective relationships with the team at NFCC, working with MHCLG on the response and proposed the creation of a group of Metropolitan FRS to share information and good practice. This has been

implemented and the High Rise Team now participates in regular conference calls co-ordinated by NFCC.

Following the publication of the Hackitt Report, MHCLG working with NFCC and Local Authority Building Control (LABC) has created a series of working groups to consider what work is necessary to develop and deliver a 'Joint Competent Authority' (JCA) arrangement.

Operational Readiness

Initially, due to the Moorland Fire incidents, there was a delay to the programmed work to develop operational guidance. During the period of the Moorland fires high rise inspections continued, with all other activity being paused so that resources could be directed to extinguishing the fires. However, subsequently significant work has been undertaken to ensure operational guidance is provided and the development of an enhanced approach to recording operational risk information for high rise residential buildings and briefings for crews and officers on operational considerations.

A major element of the work was the development of guidance for the role of operational crews in supporting and ensuring the evacuation of residents at an incident in buildings, where an evacuation strategy has been implemented. The Operational Assurance team have undertaken tests to determine the effectiveness of both smoke curtains and the use of positive pressure ventilation fans, as a means of ensuring the means of escape can be safely used by residents, whilst firefighting operations are undertaken. As a result of these tests, smoke curtains have been provided to all appliances, supported by operational guidance. This has been supported by guidance on the actions to be taken to ensure that an evacuation has been completed.

A full day briefing session for Officers took place in October 2018, which focused on an overview of the causes and risks associated with external fire spread, discussions surrounding operational fire-fighting tactics, the use of smoke curtains and the role of operational crews in aiding evacuation of the building and / or ensuring that evacuation has been completed.

The Operational Assurance team has further developed the information that needs to be gathered in relation to operational risks and considerations for high rise premises, particularly those with a risk of external fire spread. This was piloted with operational crews using a paper form and feedback used to refine the information requirements. The Operational Information System (OIS) has been updated to capture this information and again this was disseminated via an Ops Alert at the appropriate time following the briefings and bespoke briefing sessions for operational crews at the stations most affected.

Protection Board

The significant positive work undertaken by the GMHRTF and GMFRS High Rise Team in GM and on the national stage, has been recognised with GMFRS invited to be a member of the new Protection Board. Members include:

- Chair, NFCC
- Local Government Association

- Building Safety Programme Director, MHCLG
- Fire and Resilience Director, Home Office
- Head of the Fire Safety Unit, Home Office

Summary

Proactive resident engagement, operational procedures for evacuation, smoke hoods and curtains, high rise training for operational crews and participation in high rise protection at the highest level has been achieved.

Recognising there remains much to do, the combination of the foresight to establish the GMHRTF, the Mayor of Salford's leadership of the Task Force, the collaboration and engagement of the Task Force and the effective work of the GMFRS High Rise Team has placed Greater Manchester at the forefront of this challenging area of policy, practice and anticipated legislative changes following the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower.