



Agenda item:

[No.]

Cabinet

On 8th September, 2009

Report Title. **Fire safety update – scissor blocks in Haringey**

Report of **Niall Bolger, Director of Urban Environment**

Signed :

N Bolger 4th Sept - 09

Contact Officer : **Martin Hoctor, Repairs Client Manager, Homes for Haringey (020 8489 1044)**

Wards(s) affected: **Currently Hornsey and West Green wards.**

Report for: **key decision**

1. Purpose of the report (That is, the decision required)

1.1 To update Cabinet on fire safety in Haringey Council owned stock following the fire at Lakanal House

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

2.1 Following the fire at Camberwell Homes for Haringey is checking its estate to ensure that all properties comply with the standards required to alleviate the consequences should a fire occur. These proposed works, which are not required under the current fire risk assessment but are to my understanding required to meet the building control regulations. This will ensure that the lives of those residing in them are protected to the maximum possible if fire should occur.

3. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and /or other Strategies:

3.1. [click here to type]

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report and consider an immediate release of additional funding to start the recommended work. The sum to be an initial allocation of £500k for the current financial year and note that officers will be developing a comprehensive programme for consideration in November.
- 4.2 Members are asked to authorise officers to undertake a comprehensive review of the remainder of the stock and report back to Cabinet in November 2009 to cover any other maisonette properties.

5. Reason for recommendation(s)

- 5.1. To ensure the safety of residents living in Haringey Council owned housing stock.

6. Other options considered

- 6.1. See summary.

7. Summary

1. Background

Homes for Haringey have an ongoing programme for Fire Risk Assessments and we have completed all assessments for the blocks of greatest concern to the Fire Brigade (high rise and sheltered stock).

However, following the fire at Camberwell, the Department for Communities and Local Government have asked all Local Authorities to provide them with additional information about a construction style described as scissor blocks. In gathering this information we have come to a number of conclusions regarding work required in some of the council's stock.

The fire at Camberwell has focussed attention upon the risk of fire spread in buildings of scissor construction, where the entry point to the dwelling lies on one side of the building, but the upper storey sits on the other side.

Homes for Haringey are currently visiting maisonette blocks across the borough to verify in which locations this type of design exists. So far, officers have identified two estates:

- Broadwater Farm, 378 homes (42 in each of the nine blocks)
- Campsbourne Estate, where there are 40 homes in Koblenz and Rhein Houses.

In neither location does the design exactly match Lakanal in Camberwell, where the weakness lay in the internal stairs crossing the common access corridor.

2. Issues affecting Campsbourne and Broadwater Farm

On both estates, the underside of the internal staircase is unprotected and the storage cupboard formed around the stairs contains the domestic electrical intake.

2.1 Action required

There is an urgent need to protect these staircases in case of a localised outbreak of fire.

3. Issues affecting Broadwater Farm only

In the nine blocks at Broadwater Farm, the means of escape from the upper storey of the maisonettes is through an escape hatch into an adjoining property, but it is known that in a great number of instances, residents have blocked access to prevent unauthorised entry for reasons other than fire. We have not, to date, taken any action against residents who have blocked up the escape hatches.

At the date of construction, the fire safety measures at Broadwater Farm complied with the applicable code of practice, which required the provision of fire doors throughout the dwelling. The current requirements are more stringent, but there is no need to upgrade the existing measures unless major alterations are carried out within the dwellings.

Over time, some of the original fire doors have been replaced with non-fire resisting ones. This has been through a combination of residents and the council/Homes for Haringey replacing old doors with non-fire resistant ones. We are currently checking our internal processes to make sure the replacement doors we install in the future are fire proofed to the appropriate standards.

4.1 Action required

There are two options open to ensure satisfactory fire safety compliance:

- to survey and replace any missing fire doors **and** to ensure that residents allow access through the escape hatches;

or

- to survey and replace any missing fire doors **and** to bring the dwellings up current safety levels by installing smoke and heat detectors in all habitable rooms and the kitchen, which will remove the need to rely upon access through the safety hatches.

Option (a) depends upon the feasibility of policing the availability of access through the escape hatches, and this is not considered to be practically enforceable. Option (b) provides for early detection of any fire within the dwelling and its containment behind fire doors, allowing residents time to escape via the front door. This option meets the requirements of the Head of Building Control. Accordingly, officers are recommending option (b).

In addition, there are ancillary works required at Broadwater Farm to improve the adequacy of fire stopping in the service ducts and to improve smoke dispersal at the ends of the access corridors.

5. Estimated budget cost

The budget cost of the work at Campsbourne and the work on Broadwater Farm, presuming the second option is selected, is as follows:

Element	Unit costs (£s)	Number of units	Total cost (£000's)
Under-stairs fire protection	400	418	168
Replacement of fire doors	3,000 (six doors per property @£500 per door)	378	1,134
Smoke/heat detectors	600 (six detectors per property at £100 per detector)	378	227
Fire stopping ducts			146
Smoke dispersal			Uncosted
Surveying, contract preparation and management			325
		Total	2,000

6. Implementation

With one work-stream, we estimate that the programme for this project would take a maximum of two years, with 25% of costs falling within the current financial year.

Homes for Haringey officers consider that the work of first priority is the under-stairs fire protection and installation of fire alarms to provide residents with early warning. The under stairs protection is a priority because:

- On the Campsbourne estate, the under side of the internal stair case is accessed from the common part of the building and is also the electric intake cupboard. These cupboards are often areas used for the storage of

residents possessions which, when combined with the presence of the electric meter, are an obvious fire hazard. Additionally, any fire starting in this cupboard would affect the internal staircase which, if residents were upstairs, would remove their only form of escape.

- On the Broadwater Farm estate, the under stairs cupboard is accessed from inside the property, but it is again the electrical intake cupboard and is, like Campsbourne, used for storage. Again this is an obvious fire hazard. Additionally, a fire starting in this cupboard would affect the internal staircase which, if residents were upstairs, would remove a form of escape.

The protection of these under stairs cupboards was agreed to be a priority by Haringey Council's Building Control.

The next priority would be to fit fire alarms to ensure residents have as early warning of a fire as possible.

Once this work is complete, we can undertake the more challenging task of upgrading the internal fire doors where necessary.

7. Remainder of the council stock

There is also a need to carry out a comprehensive survey across all the stock containing maisonettes to identify and remedy deficiencies in the provision of fire doors and protected staircases irrespective of whether the design is scissor construction.

Homes for Haringey are developing a programme to manage this process.

8. Leaseholders

We are currently investigating which of the works outlined above are the responsibility of leaseholders and Haringey Council, the landlord.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

8.1. The final estimated costs of this work will depend on the survey work, which will assess the numbers items requiring replacement in each household. The £2m figure shown here is the maximum figure likely. The initial £0.5m can be funded from the HRA general balance which stood at £7.2m at the end of March 2009. This is above the £5m target figure because of an underspend of £2m at the end of last year.

9. Head of Legal Services Comments

9.1. The Head of Legal Services has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and advises that in view of the confirmation given that the preferred remedial option will meet with current building control Regulations, there are no specific legal implications arising out of the report.

10. Head of Procurement Comments –[Required for Procurement Committee]

10.1. [click here to type]

11. Equalities &Community Cohesion Comments

11.1. [click here to type]

12. Consultation

12.1. [click here to type]

13. Service Financial Comments

There is no provision within the HRA Capital Programme for the estimated £2 million cost of works. Should members consider that works should commence in 2009/10 then a release of £500,000 from HRA balances is proposed to fund the works in that year. Further funding commitments will be incorporated in the forthcoming review of the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy and Pre Business Plan Review.

14. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs

14.1. [click here to type]

15. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

15.1. [List background documents]

15.2. [Also list reasons for exemption or confidentiality (if applicable)]