

**Report for:** Cabinet – 8 December 2020

**Title:** Scrutiny Review on Fire Safety in High Rise Blocks; Building Control Services

**Report**

**Author:** Councillor Peray Ahmet, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Ward(s) affected** N/A

**Report for Key/**

**Non Key Decision:** Key decision

## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered an update on the implementation of the recommendations of its review on Fire Safety in High Rise Blocks at its meeting on 15 October 2020. It resolved to recommend to Cabinet that at least two apprentice Building Control Officers be recruited to the Council's Building Control team.

## **2. Report**

2.1 In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a review on Fire Safety in High Rise Blocks. Amongst other issues, the review looked at the response that was made to the fire in Haringey as well as how other London boroughs had responded. The final report of the review was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 March 2019. Cabinet responded to the recommendations at its meeting on 9 July 2019.

2.2 At its meeting on 15 October 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered an update on the implementation of the recommendations.

2.1 When undertaking the review, the Committee heard that the Council's Building Control Service faced strong competition from Approved Inspectors when trying to recruit as they are able to offer considerably higher salaries. Local authorities, including Haringey, have trained inspectors in the past. The service was down to its bare bones though and it was therefore not possible to offer training to new staff any more. It also had an ageing workforce. In some cases, it had been necessary to use agency staff or staff from other authorities.

2.2 The Committee noted that there were six surveyors in the Building Control team and five of these trained at Haringey. There was already co-operation between boroughs and Haringey undertakes some work on behalf of others. If the recommendations of the Hackitt review were implemented, additional resources might be required for the service.

2.3 The Committee heard that Tower Hamlets also have an ageing building control workforce. They had been forced, on occasion, to bring inspectors out of

retirement to fulfil their duties. Apprenticeships have been considered by them as one way of refreshing the workforce and bringing in younger people.

- 2.4 The Committee noted that there are a range of areas besides Building Control where it is also difficult to recruit appropriately qualified and experienced staff and which have an ageing workforce. Examples of such roles are environmental health, planning policy and legal officers. The Council currently takes part in the national local government graduate development programme but those who come through this scheme are focussed on strategic management roles rather than technical and professional ones.
- 2.5 The Committee was of the view that training and professional development programmes needed to be reinstated so that the Council was better able to develop its own staff rather than just relying on recruiting staff that are already qualified and experienced. It felt that there was always the danger that such staff would be enticed away by other employers but those who benefit from technical and professional training and development can be tied to the Council for a period of time. It recommended that a working group be set up to consider how to address the shortage of professional and technical staff in many areas through developing pathways to train and develop new staff as well as incentives to attract suitable individuals.
- 2.6 The recommendation was agreed by Cabinet. It was stated that a working group would be established which would comprise officers from the Council's Health & Safety team, Building Control, Learning and Development and Homes for Haringey (HfH). It also stated that when training and developing staff for these roles, the Council would look to support care leavers.
- 2.7 The update that the Committee received on 15 October Council's Building Control stated that the team had upskilled their existing surveying staff, who are all now qualified as Level 6 Fire Safety Surveyors. This is the highest competency that Building Control Surveyors can attain and will be a requirement to carry out future works on 'in-scope' buildings.
- 2.8 The report stated that recruitment and retention was critical, given the shortage of staff with the appropriate specialist knowledge and experience. The new duties for local authority Building Control teams set out in the Building Safety Bill will also require additional staff resources.
- 2.9 At meeting, the Committee noted efforts that had been made to recruit additional Building Control officers but these had not been very successful so action had instead been taken to upskill current staff. Consideration was being given to recruiting apprentices but it was not easy to deliver training at the moment though, due to the team not currently being in the office due to the pandemic. In addition, funding was a big issue.
- 2.10 The Committee expressed concern that little progress had been achieved in recruiting additional Building Control officers. It felt that if additional officers were recruited, they could potentially generate income for the Council. It was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that action be taken to recruit at least two apprentice Building Control Officers.

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 That action be taken to recruit at least two apprentice Building Control Officers.

### **4. Background**

4.1 A link to the papers considered by the Overview and Scrutiny is below:  
[Agenda item - Fire Safety - Update on Implementation of Recommendations from Scrutiny Review | Haringey Council](#)