



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Community Safety Committee

# **GRENFELL TOWER FIRE**

## **Report of the Chief Fire Officer**

**Date:** 06 October 2017

**Purpose of Report:**

To update Members on the work that has been carried out by the Service following the tragic fire at the Grenfell Tower Block, North Kensington.

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Grenfell Tower in Kensington, North West London, is a 24-storey housing block that was built in the 1970s and contains 129 flats. A fire at the tower started in the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017 and spread quickly. Currently there are 80+ people confirmed missing presumed dead. The fire started in a fridge-freezer in a fourth floor flat, the growth of the fire is believed to have been accelerated by the building's exterior cladding. At its height over 250 firefighters were tackling the blaze and carried out approximately 65 rescues.
- 1.2 There is an ongoing fire investigation being carried out by officers from the London Fire Brigade with a separate criminal investigation being carried out by the Metropolitan Police. The Government has announced a public enquiry into the fire which will report directly to the Prime Minister. The purpose of the enquiry is to discover what happened at Grenfell Tower and to make recommendations to prevent a similar tragedy happening again.
- 1.3 The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is taking the main coordinating role for information coming from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and other Government departments and for communicating that information to fire and rescue services (FRSs). The main communication method has been in the form of daily situation reports (SITREP) generated by the NFCC, these are designed to seek and share information and to enable an accurate picture of the current situation to be developed and shared.
- 1.4 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) is the main fire safety legislation fire and rescue authorities are responsible for enforcing. The Order is designed to provide a minimum fire safety standard in all non-domestic premises. In practical terms, in tall residential buildings such as Grenfell the RRO applies only to the common areas of the building and as such the residents' flats themselves are not regulated by the FRSs. There are other complimentary regulations, enforced by others, that can be used to enforce fire safety in these buildings, which includes the Housing Act 2004 and health and safety legislation.
- 1.5 The designated responsible person (RP) is the individual with the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the RRO, in residential tall buildings this is any person having control to some extent or the owner. Those persons designated as the RP or a person acting on their behalf, are required to carry out certain fire safety duties which include ensuring the general fire precautions are satisfactory and conducting a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment.
- 1.6 The Fire Protection department takes a risk based approach when determining the annual fire safety audit programme. The emphasis and focus of the audit programme is based upon the Chief Fire Officers Association guidance. Premises which present the highest risk, will be inspected on a

more frequent basis. Those premises considered to be lower risk will be inspected primarily in response to complaints, following incidents or on a random basis to verify their lower risk classification and to confirm that the responsible persons are complying with their statutory duty to comply with the requirements of the RRO.

## **2. REPORT**

- 2.1 In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire a number of cross government meetings were held to coordinate the wider response to the incident and to manage the immediate actions that would be generated from across Government departments for local authorities, FRSs and other agencies.
- 2.2 In the days following the incident DCLG had generated a national list of over 400 buildings where they believed aluminium composite materials (ACM) had been used in the external cladding of these buildings, as was identified as used in the recent refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. At the same time DCLG had also sent out a letter to all Local Authorities and other registered providers of social housing asking them to identify whether any cladding panels used in new build or refurbishment were ACM. In the initial list of 400 buildings there were no buildings within Nottinghamshire identified as having ACM cladding.
- 2.3 The NFCC was tasked with coordinating the FRSs response to the incident, which included tasking individual Services to carry out RRO fire safety audits on buildings identified through DCLG's data collecting exercise. The NFCC administered through the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service started to send out requests for audits to be carried out in the first week following the fire.
- 2.4 The NFCC started to send out daily SITREPs on 26 June, these included details of the number of audits completed nationally by FRSs. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) received the first request for an audit to be carried out on 3 July. Since this first request a further three requests for audits by NFRS have been generated from the NFCC. Further requests for audits have been received from numerous sources (Nottingham City Homes, NHS sites across the county, Nottingham City Council etc.). As a consequence of the Grenfell Tower fire, NFRS will have carried out over 60 audits of tall buildings with the majority of those coming out as broadly compliant against the RRO.
- 2.5 The single largest request for action came from Nottingham City Council who had produced a list of over 500 buildings that they had classified as tall buildings. The list was reviewed by NFRS's Fire Protection team and using a variation of the existing risk based audit programme methodology:
  - Height and occupancy of the building;
  - Presence of sprinklers;
  - Cladding present;

- ACM cladding confirmed;
- NCC priority rating.

The Service determined that buildings of a heightened risk would be audited by the Service, medium risk would be reviewed as part of NFRS's ongoing risk based audit programme. The remaining buildings came out as low risk and would be written to by the Service reminding them of their responsibilities under the RRO.

- 2.6 DCLG has used the British Research Establishment (BRE) and other suitably qualified companies to carry out large scale testing of cladding systems on tall buildings to better understand how the different types of ACM panels behave, with two different types of insulation in a fire. The outside cladding systems require intrusive tests and as such the Service has had no part in carrying out the tests on cladding other than identifying in the NFCC audit returns that a building does have cladding.
- 2.7 As well as the request for FRSs to carry out audits on potential ACM cladded buildings, the NFCC SITREPs also contain a situational overview, a specific situation update, additional information and requests for specific information from FRSs. A chronology started by the Service to record Service specific inputs and outputs since the Grenfell Tower fire shows that over 100 SITREPs have been received from the NFCC.
- 2.8 The individual requests for information and tasks contained within these SITREPs have had a considerable impact on the capacity of the Fire Protection team to carry on with business as usual. With this in mind, the decision was taken to re-prioritise the annual risk based audit programme to ensure that the tall buildings identified by NCC were prioritised. This approach will continue until the increase in work activity associated with the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower fire have subsided. The Fire Protection team continue to deal with complaints and post fire inspections as a priority.
- 2.9 One of the initial actions that the Service took was to convene a Serious Event Review Group (SERG), with a focus on coordinating the Service response to the local and national impact of the Grenfell Tower fire. The SERG is also tasked with considering all future outcomes from a regulatory, firefighter safety and operational assurance perspective which includes a review of pre-determined attendance standards at tall buildings. It is intended that the SERG will reduce duplication of effort in reaching an understanding of Grenfell Tower fire, make efficient use of the skills and knowledge of colleagues within the Service and elsewhere, and assist the development of service improvements.
- 2.10 Public reassurance has been a Service priority since the incident and NFRS is continuing to support partners in the City and County to help them make their residents safer, and to ensure businesses are compliant with the relevant legislation. The Fire Protection and Fire Prevention departments have carried out joint visits to tall buildings managed by social housing providers in the interests of providing public reassurance. The Service also convened a strategic briefing of other local authorities and tall building owners to

coordinate the different strands of information that were coming from Central Government to ensure that a consistent approach and public safety message was provided to all communities.

- 2.11 Internal and external communications have been managed by the Corporate Communications team. The consistent theme in all communications has been that the Service is taking a balanced and proportionate approach in managing the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower fire. Initial requests for information came in many forms including the media, freedom of information requests and members of the public with general enquiries around their safety in tall buildings. The level of requests for information peaked in the first few weeks following the Grenfell Tower fire, the level of requests has now fallen back to a level that would normally be received by the Service.
- 2.12 The validity of the 'Stay Put' evacuation policy has been called in to question following the Grenfell Tower fire. The 'Stay Put' policy is individual to each tall building and is predicated on the fire engineering solutions within the building being maintained to the required standard. The fire engineering solutions are linked to the basic requirement for escape routes and flats to be protected for a minimum of 60 minutes. The 'Stay Put' policy also relies on some basic guidance to residents being made available prior to any incident of fire:
- If a fire occurs in a flat, the occupants should alert others inside the flat, make their way out of the building and call the fire service;
  - If a fire starts in any of the shared areas (staircase, corridors etc.) anyone in these areas should make their way out of the building and call the fire service;
  - All residents not directly affected by a fire would be expected to 'stay put' and remain in their flat unless:
    - a. Smoke or heat affects their flat; or
    - b. They are told to leave by the fire and rescue service.
  - It is not implied that if people wish to leave the building they should be prevented from doing so. Nor does this preclude those evacuating a flat that is on fire, from alerting their neighbours so that they can also escape if they feel threatened.
- 2.13 NFRS control room personnel have been briefed to confirm the correct context and use of the 'Stay Put' policy when they are called to give fire survival guidance to residents of tall buildings in the instance of a fire in their building. The national approach to the 'Stay Put' policy is being reviewed as part of the independent public enquiry.
- 2.14 Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed to Chair the Public enquiry into the circumstances surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower. The terms of reference (ToR) for the enquiry are broad as would be expected. As well as looking at the technical fire safety and fire investigation issue the enquiry will seek to examine social housing policy and also the relationship between the residents of Grenfell Tower and the local authority.

2.15 The NFCC, in consultation with FRSSs, has contributed to the ToR of the enquiry and have proposed a number of areas that should be examined as part of the enquiry, these include:

- A review of the building regulations and associated guidance;
- The role of Building Control and Approved Inspectors;
- The relationship between the Housing Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- Reviewing the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- Firefighting equipment and fixed installations in high rise premises (sprinklers);
- Competency of Fire Risk Assessors;
- Competency the construction industry to understand and apply appropriate fire safety measures when constructing or refurbishing a building;
- Suitability of tests for materials used in building construction, and in this case for high-rise buildings;
- 'Stay Put' evacuation strategy;
- The role other Category 1 and 2 responders within the Civil Contingencies Act, in both the response and recovery phases of the incident;
- The (Construction Design and Management) Regulations 2015;
- Review of DCLG Fire Safety Guides;
- Product recall – white goods;
- How the fire service is organised to provide the 999 operational response to fires in high rise buildings.

2.16 The initial outcomes of the enquiry are due to be presented to the Government in the spring of 2018. The Service will continue to monitor the situation and act to address issues as they arise. Some of the outcomes of the enquiry are likely to have a direct impact on service delivery including response, prevention and fire protection functions. A further report to the Fire Authority will follow once the implications of the enquiry are known.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report. Dependant on the outcomes of the public enquiry there could be financial implications associated with those outcomes.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct human resources or learning and development implications associated with this report. Dependant on the outcomes of the public enquiry there could be implications associated with those outcomes.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because the contents of this report are not concerned with Service policy or procedures.

## **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Fire and Rescue Authority are the primary enforcing authority for the enforcement of the RRO. Close monitoring of developments coming out of the Grenfell Tower fire and the public enquiry are vital for the Authority to discharge its functions under the RRO.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There could be a corporate risk if the Service were not to continue to engage with the various Government departments and agencies that are dealing with the outfall of the Grenfell Tower fire.
- 8.2 The SERG and Fire Protection Management Team has revised the risk based audit programme in response to the Grenfell Tower Fire in line with both Central Government and the NFCC guidance. In the short term this impacted on the capacity of the Fire Protection team. However, Members can be assured that the Service remains focused on those non-domestic buildings that pose the greatest risk to residents and communities.

## **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Service is collaborating with the other Services from across the region by sharing best practice in dealing with the outcomes for FRSs from the Grenfell Tower fire. This includes working practices, tactical management of the issue and the development of the NFCC position statement on Building Regulations and associated guidance.
- 9.2 The Service has also collaborated with local councils and social housing providers at all levels across the service to ensure consistent and suitable information was made available to all those that have a responsibility for the management of residential tall buildings.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members note the contents of the report.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

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**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**