

COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

25 JULY 2017

County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Authority



GRENFELL TOWER FIRE AND THE ACTIONS FOR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report provides members with information regarding the Grenfell Tower fire that occurred on 14 June 2017 and the initial actions fire and rescue services have been asked to undertake following the incident.

BACKGROUND

2. Members will have seen and heard many news reports over the last six weeks which have described in detail of how the fire spread so quickly through the 67m, 24 storey Grenfell Tower claiming at least 80 lives.
3. This report does not cover any detail on the operational aspects of the incident as all the information that can be released to the public has already been covered in the media reports. Instead the report details the work that is being undertaken nationally by fire and rescue services to deal with the initial fire safety issues that have emerged from the incident and the specific implications for County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).
4. The response from fire and rescue services is being coordinated by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) with its Chair, Roy Wiltshire, representing the NFCC at various cross government meetings and also with national housing partners.

ADDRESSING THE INITIAL FIRE SAFETY ISSUES NATIONALLY

5. The initial issues highlighted for action that are being addressed nationally are:
 - Identification of residential tower blocks that are fitted with external cladding that is the same or similar to that used on Grenfell Tower;
 - The testing of panels from the identified buildings;
 - The inspection of these properties to assess the level of fire safety measures within the buildings;
 - The identification of non-residential properties fitted with the same or similar cladding.
6. Initially a list of approximately 600 high-rise properties with the same, or similar style cladding to Grenfell Tower were identified; however, this number has subsequently been revised down to approximately 500 with almost half of the total located in London.

7. For each of the identified buildings, samples of the external cladding are removed and tested by the British Research Establishment (BRE). In addition to this test each of the premises is inspected by the relevant fire and rescue service.
8. If the sample fails the fire tests, or, if the fire safety measures within the building are deemed inadequate by the inspecting fire and rescue service, appropriate action has then been taken to ensure resident safety. In the majority of cases suitable and sufficient immediate remedial action has been undertaken causing minimum disruption to residents; however, in the more serious cases the only safe option has been to ask the residents to move out of their homes until significant building work can be undertaken.
9. In addition to high-rise residential blocks the other main buildings that have been identified as a potential risk are hospitals, which resulted in an initial request from NHS England for fire and rescue services to inspect all their properties within a three day time period. This request was not only impossible for fire and rescue services to achieve, it was also unnecessary as the vast majority of those buildings would be classed as low risk.
10. Through dialogue between the NFCC and NHS England a revised list of approximately 40 high risk premises were identified which fire and rescue services were able to inspect in an appropriate time scale.

IMPACT ON CDDFRS

11. None of the nationally identified high-rise residential or NHS properties are located in County Durham or Darlington. Within our operational area we have no residential or hotel buildings over seven floors and no buildings above 10 floors. To date no occupied buildings have been identified as having cladding the same or similar to that used on Grenfell Tower.
12. However, a significant amount of work has been undertaken by our Business Fire Safety Team, in partnership with Durham County Council (DCC), Darlington Borough Council (DBC), NHS England and residential landlords; the work has included:
 - Reviewing the risk based inspection programme;
 - Carrying out inspections of residential flats to ensure fire precautions are suitable and sufficient and to provide reassurance to residents;
 - Carrying out inspections and providing support to schools/colleges;
 - Liaising with the building control departments of DCC and DBC to agree a consistent approach across the area with agreed key messages for occupiers;
 - Liaising with NHS estates to ensure properties have up to date risk assessments; and
 - Providing advice to landlords/occupiers of those properties that operate a 'stay put' or 'horizontal evacuation policy'.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

13. Although the public enquiry into the fire has yet to start, there is already a clear call to carry out a full review of fire safety requirements in buildings and the need to review the Building Regulations (Approved Document B) to ensure fire safety requirements keep pace with new building developments.

14. The NFCC have recently issued a position statement which welcomes the prioritisation of a review of the Building Regulations and reiterates support for the wider use of sprinklers in new buildings and where appropriate the retro fitting of them into existing high risk premises which would include high-rise residential buildings.
15. When these reviews are carried out it is expected that fire and rescue services will be consultees during the development of any new regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Members are requested to **note** the contents of the report.

DCFO Colin Bage

Tel: 0191 3755585