

Action taken by the County Council (Dorset Property) following the Grenfell Tower Fire

Statement to Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 6 July 2017

1. Introduction

Following the tragic event of the devastating fire at the Grenfell Tower in Kensington on 14 June, our thoughts are with those whose loved ones died in the fire, with those who have suffered injuries and with those who have lost their homes.

Colleagues across the public sector, in particular the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, are undertaking focused work in liaison with local authorities and other key stakeholders to ensure that our local communities, and particularly those who live in high rise buildings, are as safe as possible from the risk of fire.

At this stage the full details behind the tragic events at Grenfell Tower are not fully known and it will remain this way until a full investigation is carried out as part of the public inquiry.

The county council provides no high rise social housing, but we are responsible for many public buildings around the county, including schools. Without in any way pre-judging the investigation and public inquiry into what happened at Grenfell Tower, we began an immediate and voluntary investigation into the use of cladding in our properties to check the materials used, that they meet regulations and have been installed correctly.

It is too early to draw conclusions from what happened at Grenfell Tower as there are many fire safety factors to be considered - all potentially contributing to the outcome. Dorset County Council takes safety very seriously and what this incident reminds us of is the need to be vigilant in our design, maintenance and management of all public buildings.

This note focusses on the building and occupation related aspects. The county council also has a role in respect of civil contingency planning and response for major incidents, such as the Grenfell Tower fire. The Safeguarding Committee is receiving information on this aspect separately, but in summary our role includes:

- Rest Centres
- Supporting the police with Casualty Bureau, survivor/evacuee reception centre(s)
- Community Hub/Information and advice points
- Trauma support

All of which would be done in co-ordination with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit

Part of this would include co-ordinated communications across the LRF partners.

2. The need for action

There is significant work taking place within Government, supported by the LGA in respect of the wider aspects of fire safety and Regulation, which will become clearer in coming weeks.

In the meantime the Government, through the Cabinet Office, is co-ordinating precautionary assessments of public sector buildings with priority checks and priority buildings being assessed first. They will use the information to assess where best to target advice and support. We are informed that they will be issuing a number of

communications in the coming weeks. They advise that **'we do need to take all reasonable precautionary measures and be ready to rapidly implement any recommendations that come from the findings of the ongoing investigations'**.

There is also a need to satisfy occupants of our buildings that they are safe and be able to respond to any concerns raised.

3. Progress to date

3.1 In respect of buildings, we have adopted a risk stratified approach and given priority in our investigations to those buildings where we have people sleeping and those occupied by vulnerable adults and children.

3.2 We commenced a voluntary 'desktop' based investigation on 16 June into the use of metal faced cladding, potentially Aluminium Composite Material (ACM), across all 1575 buildings in the county council estate (irrespective of size and occupancy). This was based on property surveyors' knowledge of particular sites, along with photographic records and was completed on 30 June.

3.3 Based on the 'desktop' studies, at this stage we have determined the estate comprises:

706 'service' buildings - typically care homes, day centres, schools, libraries, offices and depots:

623 with no metal cladding

83 with metal cladding - more detailed investigation is now underway on each of the 83 buildings known to have metal cladding to determine whether ACM is present

817 agricultural outbuildings – A substantial number of these comprise single skin metal cladding, but none are likely to be ACM

52 residential/farm houses – none with metal cladding

3.4 Samples will be taken and tested where ACM is believed to be present. Where ACM cladding is identified, an occupancy risk assessment will be carried out. In the meantime we have contacted the county council's Directorate Duty Holders Group requesting that they contact all of the premises their Service occupies to ensure they are:

- Carrying out their weekly fire alarm checks and reviews
- Carrying out fire drills (at least twice yearly for all buildings and termly for schools) – if in doubt carry one out ASAP
- They know their Fire Risk Assessment, when it was completed and last reviewed and to ensure all actions identified have been addressed.

3.5 Response to Central Government requests for information and supply answers as appropriate.

- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) survey into the use of (ACM) cladding on high rise residential blocks – nil return submitted on 19 June 2017 deadline. The County Council has no high rise social housing.
- DFE/ESFA – School Fire Safety Survey – return submitted on 30 June 2017. This focussed on schools within the county council's remit (excluding academies etc) which are either of a residential nature, or schools which are four storeys or more. In the latter respect, we have only one school building to declare – Clare Hall at Budmouth College and we have no DCC schools with residential units

Academies and VA schools have been required to make their own returns to DFE/ESFA

- 3.6 We have also been developing an action plan to review our Fire Risk Management Strategy across the estate:
- Review fire risk management strategy at DCC (to be complete within a month)
 - Review fire risk management at all DCC establishments (including all partnerships and trading arms)
 - Review outcomes and implement improvement plan – To be complete by April 2018 overall, with schools targeted for completion by the end of 2017
 - DDH Strategy – DDH's to confirm their approach (possible questionnaire?)
 - Audit all establishments on a risk based approach to assess approach/ compliance
- 3.7 The County Council has been delivering Warmer Homes projects since Public Health came back into the authority – in this context we are not the property owner, but have been involved in the commissioning of insulation products. We have checked with the Healthy Homes Dorset Programme Manager and neither current, nor past, insulation projects (looking back to 2010) have used external cladding or panels.
- 3.8 Dorset County Council in general, and Healthy Homes Dorset specifically, work closely with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service, since key groups of residents vulnerable to living in cold homes are very similar to those at high risk of fire death. Over 50 referrals have been made from Healthy Homes Dorset to the Fire Service (mainly for home safety checks) and vice versa.

Healthy Homes Dorset phase 1 and several previous projects have used insulation products: Instabead and Instafibre. Whilst these are not ACM, they may need to be checked at some point if the focus of attention on insulation and any related fire risk increases.

- 3.9 We are also responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests from the public and media regarding this matter.

4. **Conclusion**

This is a fast moving issue and it is possible that the initial focus on ACM cladding will extend to other forms of insulation and the build-up of external walling systems. From the Government surveys, it is clear that questions are being asked about all aspects of fire safety. We have not had to answer these questions for most of our buildings as they do not qualify for a return. However, we are mindful of the need, ultimately, to be satisfied with our overall fire safety arrangements and the questions asked provide useful prompts.

Our surveys as yet do not cover projects in design or construction. With materials fire performance being tested recently in a variety of ways and potentially giving some cause for concern, it is worth remembering that our in-house/external commissioned designers will specify products for construction in good faith. They will rely on the manufacturer's promise of performance via 'Agreement' certification by the British Board of Agreement, or similar, and comply in full with Building Regulation requirements.

We will need to complete the work outlined above and follow developments very carefully and ensure we promptly comply with any advice, instructions and learning that emerges from the tragedy of Grenfell Tower.

David Roe: Buildings and Construction Service Manager
4 July 2017