

Place Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings (Task & Finish)

**Final Report
July 2017**

Place Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
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Select Committee - Membership

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Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Richard McGuckin (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council - Director of Economic Growth and Development Services)
- Jane Edmonds (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council - Housing Services Manager)
- Ray Sullivan (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council - Building Control Manager)
- Councillor Barry Woodhouse (Billingham Central Ward)
- Peter Taylor (Thirteen Group - Health and Safety Manager)
- Chris Marshall (Thirteen Group - Stockton Area Manager)
- Joe Flounders (Cleveland Fire Brigade - Head of Fire Engineering)
- Steve Johnson (Cleveland Fire Brigade - Group Manager/District Manager Stockton and Hartlepool)
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Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review supports the following Council policy principles:

- Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention (in relation to people who are subject to or at risk of harm and people whose circumstances make them vulnerable)
- Developing strong and healthy communities (in relation to providing mainstream services that are available where needed)

The review will also contribute to the following Council Plan 2017-2020 key objectives:

Environment and Housing

- Housing: Influence and work in partnership with developers and registered social landlords to deliver affordable housing provision of a high standard and quality.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

On the 14th June 2017, a major fire broke out at Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey 220-foot (70-metre) high tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington, west London, resulting in a high number of casualties and severe damage to the building. Although the cause of the fire is yet to be confirmed, the speed at which the fire spread is believed to have been aided by the buildings recently added exterior cladding (part of a 2016 refurbishment). Speculation has also been raised around the release of poisonous gases by burning insulation.

The scale of this tragedy (the presumed total number of fatalities is 80) has led the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to request that fire safety checks are urgently carried out on all tower blocks, and for Local Authorities and Housing Associations to ensure that appropriate safety and response measures are in place. Crucially, there is an immediate need to provide residents within such buildings with the appropriate reassurances.

To this end, an urgent task and finish scrutiny review has been initiated which will consider high rise social residential properties within the Borough owned and managed by Tristar Homes Limited (part of the housing group Thirteen), other high rise residential properties as identified by the Fire Brigade (i.e. those owned and/or managed by other providers including private owners), and other appropriate Council assets, including residential properties externally clad (as part of the recent Go Warm investment programme). The aim of this review will be to:

- Establish the residential buildings in question, and identify any areas of concern in terms of fire risk, particularly around the type of cladding used on Grenfell Tower.
- Review if robust fire risk assessments have been/are in place, and understand what these assessments entail.
- Consider the safety advice given to residents who live in tower blocks.
- Provide reassurance to residents, Ward Councillors and the DCLG.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

The Council's, and partner agencies, initial response to the Grenfell Tower fire.

The type of, and rationale behind, cladding being added to buildings in Stockton-on-Tees.

Has there been any use of the particular type of cladding in question (made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM)) in new builds/refurbishments in Stockton?

The procedures around fire risk assessments, how often these are carried out, and by whom? How are issues arising from these assessments addressed, and how is this communicated to residents?

Are all flat entrance doors, and doors that open onto escape corridors and stairways, fire-resisting and effectively self-closing against any resistance of a latch?

Are smoke control/extraction systems, including associated fire detection systems, operating correctly? How regularly are these checked/monitored?

The feasibility of sprinkler systems (internal/external), if not already in place, within high rise buildings.

How the Local Authority, Thirteen and Fire Brigade engage with residents to ensure they fully understand the emergency fire procedures in the building, and know how to report concerns.

Establish any fire safety concerns that have previously been raised in relation to any high rise buildings in the Borough, and ascertain what has been done to address these issues.

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

Having robust fire safety procedures, and ensuring residents understand these, is critical for housing providers, never more so than following the recent tragic events in North Kensington. This short task and finish review offers the opportunity to identify issues around the materials used on high rise (and other) residential buildings in the Borough, examine and enhance fire safety processes within such properties, and provide residents with much-needed reassurance.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's task and finish scrutiny review of Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings.
- 1.2 On the 14th June 2017, a major fire broke out at Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey 220-foot (70-metre) high tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington, west London, resulting in a high number of casualties and severe damage to the building. The cause of the fire is suspected to be a faulty fridge-freezer in a fourth floor flat, and the speed at which the fire spread is believed to have been aided by the buildings recently added exterior cladding (part of a 2016 refurbishment). Speculation was also raised around the release of poisonous gases from burning insulation.
- 1.3 The scale of this tragedy led the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to request that fire safety checks were urgently carried out on all tower blocks, and for Local Authorities and Housing Associations to ensure that appropriate safety and response measures are in place. Crucially, there was an immediate need to provide residents within such buildings with the appropriate reassurances.
- 1.4 The main focus for this urgently initiated review was therefore to identify any areas of concern in terms of fire risk in relation to high rise social residential properties within Stockton-on-Tees owned and managed by Thirteen Group. Other high rise residential properties as identified by Cleveland Fire Brigade (i.e. those owned and/or managed by other providers, including private owners) and other appropriate Council assets, including residential properties externally clad (as part of the recent Go Warm investment programme), would also be considered.
- 1.5 Members were reassured with the responses provided by all key local partner agencies following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, and it was clearly evident that a high degree of co-ordinated effort had been put into addressing the understandable concerns of residents of high rise buildings across Stockton-on-Tees. More importantly, residents themselves had expressed positive views regarding agency responses, in particular those of Thirteen Group. Partners should be commended for their approach in such challenging circumstances.
- 1.6 Due to the scale of the disaster in North Kensington, the issue of fire safety resonates far beyond the boundaries of Stockton-on-Tees. The events of the 14th June 2017 have demanded a national focus, and local partners will need to be prepared to consider (and act on where required) the outcomes of the Government's forthcoming public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.

Recommendations

1. **Ensure the Committee receives further updates from key partner agencies around the stated ongoing investigations of high rise residential buildings across the Borough.**

Recommendations (continued)

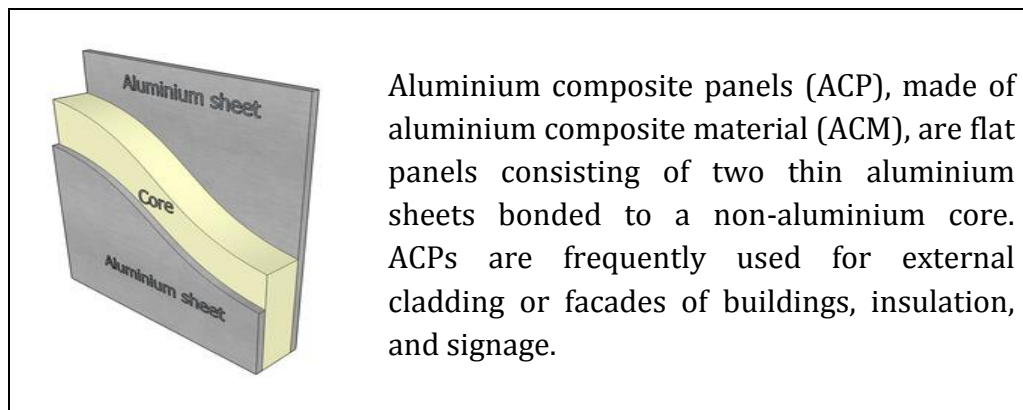
- 2. Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Government is strongly lobbied to improve and strengthen building control mechanisms in relation to fire safety.**
- 3. All key partner agencies to consider the outcomes from Thirteen Group's commissioned independent inquiry around the presence of Class 3 combustible cladding at Kennedy Gardens, and act where necessary.**
- 4. Landlords to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of fire risk assessments, including that the building itself meets fire risk assessment standards, and that the responsibility of tenants in maintaining robust fire safety measures and timely reporting of any areas of concern to their landlord is reinforced.**
- 5. Committee recommends the installation of sprinkler/misting systems in all high rise residential buildings across Stockton-on-Tees.**
- 6. The Council writes to all landlords of high rise residential buildings in Stockton-on-Tees to ensure compliance with fire regulations, which takes into account vulnerable occupants, information on which is regularly updated.**
- 7. Consideration to be given by all key partner agencies on the outcomes from the Government's public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower, or any related, fire once available.**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's task and finish scrutiny review of Fire Safety of High Rise Residential Buildings.
- 2.2 The main focus for this urgently initiated review was to identify any areas of concern in terms of fire risk in relation to high rise social residential properties within Stockton-on-Tees owned and managed by Thirteen Group. Other high rise residential properties as identified by Cleveland Fire Brigade (i.e. those owned and/or managed by other providers, including private owners) and other appropriate Council assets, including residential properties externally clad (as part of the recent Go Warm investment programme), would also be considered.
- 2.3 A key priority was to establish if any of the local buildings in question used the particular type of cladding that was present on Grenfell Tower, the tower block in North Kensington, West London, where a major fire broke out in June 2017 leading to a high number of fatalities.
- 2.4 Further aims for the review included analysis of whether robust fire risk assessments have been/are in place, and consideration of the fire safety advice given to residents who live in such properties. An overarching objective was to provide assurance to residents who were understandably anxious following the events in North Kensington.
- 2.5 The Committee received evidence from key partner agencies, namely the Local Authority, Thirteen Group and Cleveland Fire Brigade.
- 2.6 In order to understand any issues and concerns from residents around fire safety, members visited Kennedy Gardens in Billingham. This also gave an opportunity to hear directly from residents on the advice they have received from local agencies, and whether they felt reassured.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 On the 14th June 2017, a major fire broke out at Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey 220-foot (70-metre) high tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington, west London, resulting in a high number of casualties and severe damage to the building. The cause of the fire is suspected to be a faulty fridge-freezer in a fourth floor flat, and the speed at which the fire spread is believed to have been aided by the buildings recently added exterior cladding (part of a 2016 refurbishment). Speculation was also raised around the release of poisonous gases from burning insulation.
- 3.2 The scale of this tragedy led the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to request that fire safety checks were urgently carried out on all tower blocks, and for Local Authorities and Housing Associations to ensure that appropriate safety and response measures are in place. Crucially, there was an immediate need to provide residents within such buildings with the appropriate reassurances.
- 3.3 Local Authorities and Housing Associations were initially requested to identify properties that were more than 18 metres high, and had been clad with aluminium type panels (with a return to be submitted to the DCLG by the end of the 19th June 2017) (see appendix 1).
- 3.4 Local Authorities and Housing Associations who believed that they may have buildings with a particular type of cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) were advised by the DCLG to submit a cladding sample to the Buildings Research Establishment (BRE) for testing as a matter of urgency. The Local Government Association (LGA) also suggested that authorities may also want to review the insulation used in any cladding system, as that could be a significant fire risk factor.



- 3.5 If it was determined that the insulation within Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) was unlikely to be compliant with the requirements of the current Building Regulations, a range of interim mitigating measures (recommended by an independent panel of experts) were to be immediately implemented to ensure the safety of residents, pending replacement of the cladding (see appendix 2).
- 3.6 Residential landlords in the private sector were also able to use the DCLG testing facility through the BRE. Councils were urged to publicise this offer to local private landlords with buildings over 18 metres, and the LGA asked for

councils to be made aware of all the testing information relating to their area so that they can take an overview of the situation locally.

- 3.7 Buildings less than 18 metres tall were not subject to the same requirements in terms of cladding. However, the LGA will be working with the Government to take account of the learning from all this work in reviewing current regulations and requirements.
- 3.8 In terms of schools, the Director of Capital at the Education and Skills Funding Agency wrote to Directors of Children's Services on the 23rd June 2017 asking for a survey return to be submitted for each school that a council maintains (by close of play on the 30th June 2017). The survey clarifies that councils do not need to include details of Voluntary Aided schools or academies in their returns. The Chief Executives of academy trusts and Dioceses have been written to separately.
- 3.9 All hospitals, despite each one having a tailored fire safety plan, have been asked to conduct additional checks on a precautionary basis.
- 3.10 Regarding costs, the Government is clear that it is the landlord's responsibility to ensure their property is safe and complies with all relevant standards. However, it has signalled that it will work with Local Authorities which have funding issues to see what support it could offer, though cost considerations are not central to councils' immediate decision-making to keep people safe. The LGA is working closely with Government and will seek appropriate support for councils who are working incredibly hard in the interests of their residents.
- 3.11 The Government has ordered a full public inquiry into the devastating fire in Grenfell Tower.

4.0 Findings & Recommendations

Pre-June 2017

- 4.1 Thirteen Group informed the Committee that fire risk assessments are conducted as part of either a one or two-year cycle, though high rise buildings follow a one-year programme of assessment.

As outlined in the Local Government Association's *Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats (2012)* guidance, the fire risk assessment must consider the 'general fire precautions' defined in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the FSO). Of these, the principal ones for a purpose-built block of flats are:

- measures to reduce the risk of fire and the risk of the spread of fire
- means of escape from fire
- measures to ensure that escape routes can be safely and effectively used
- an emergency plan, including procedures for residents in the event of fire
- measures to mitigate the effects of fire.

There is no legal requirement for the fire risk assessment to be carried out by specialists, such as consultants.

- 4.2 Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans were re-introduced, which involved the completion of questionnaires - this identified any tenants with disabilities or those who might not be able to manage staircases in an emergency. This information is made available to the Fire Brigade.
- 4.3 Thirteen Group previously had four different fire alarm systems (as per the old groups/organisations that now make up Thirteen Group), and identified the need for consistency for monitoring purposes. In addition, the Concierge Team were conducting high rise floor walks three times per day in Middlesbrough - this was inconsistent with what was happening in Stockton-on-Tees.
- 4.4 Following the fire at Anson House, Thornaby, on the 19th April 2017, Thirteen Group announced that an investigation would be undertaken. Although a tragic event which resultant in one person losing their life, the fire was contained to the one flat, and the safety measures in place prevented the fire spreading. Anson House was part of a consultants review on fire alarms in the group's high rises which indicated a number of inconsistencies with the monitoring and levels of detection installed. Flats within Anson House had detection fitted and was monitored. The investigation remains ongoing. The number of people on site reassuring tenants after the incident was a positive, but it has been identified that a business continuity plan would be beneficial in supporting staff in such situations.
- 4.5 Cleveland Fire Brigade conducts a risk-based inspection programme (including flats and houses of multiple occupation (HMOs)) which involves communal areas only, not flats themselves (the Fire Brigade has no power to gain entry). Inspections of high rise buildings are based on risk to the premises and fire safety compliance (i.e. how Thirteen Group manage arrangements). Those properties considered high risk with low compliance can be inspected every six months - low risk properties with high compliance may only be inspected up to every five years.

- 4.6 An initiative was conducted in Dawson House (Billingham) to increase the residents' home fire safety knowledge earlier this year as part of the station-based targeting. A specific Action Plan was implemented in May 2017 at Anson House and Hudson House (Thornaby) following a fire death - this went well, and Thirteen Group were thanked for their assistance. As a spin-off to the Anson House/Hudson House plan, the Fire Brigade expanded their Home Fire Safety Visits, targeting Kennedy Garden Flats (Billingham) in May 2017. Billingham Fire Station crews were targeting residents in these 3 blocks prior to the Grenfell Tower incident.
- 4.7 Issues around fire safety compliance were highlighted. The Fire Brigade can use powers if there is a lack of compliance by landlords, and can serve an enforcement notice which has timescales attached (minimum 28 days). For low level issues, a notification of fire safety deficiencies letter will be sent - these are followed up to provide assurances that any concerns have been addressed. There are differing consequences at differing levels of compliance.

Post-Grenfell Tower Fire

Local Authority

- 4.8 The Government has not asked Local Authorities to take responsibility following the events in North Kensington, but there appears to be an inference that Council's take the lead locally.
- 4.9 A number of Council services including Emergency Planning, Fire Services and Building Control have been involved in the initial response to the Grenfell Tower fire. Richard McGuckin (SBC Director of Economic Growth and Development Services) is the Lead Officer in terms of the Local Authority's management of this issue, and daily meetings are being held to monitor progress and engagement.
- 4.10 The visibility of activity within the Council may not necessarily be obvious to members, but assurance was given that both the Cabinet Member (Cllr Nigel Cooke) and Leader (Cllr Bob Cook) are involved in discussions. There has been a lot of thought around what to communicate to the public in a sensitive and measured manner.
- 4.11 The Government has confirmed that relevant buildings requiring consideration are those with either six or more storeys, or 18 metres or more high (whichever is the shortest) - these parameters have been determined on the basis of fire-fighting ability and evacuation reasons. The buildings that meet this criteria in Stockton-on-Tees were listed as follows, and it was noted that most were privately owned.

| 6 storey's (18m) or more in Stockton-on-Tees | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Anstey House | Kennedy Gardens (3 blocks) |
| Gilpin House | Melsonby Court |
| Hanover Point | Prior Court |
| Rialto Court | Dawson House |
| Nolan House | Anson House |
| Hume House | Hudson House |
| Elm House | Bayheath House |

4.12 It was noted that most building owners have been very compliant when approached by the Council, though Local Authorities do have powers to step in where they are met with less compliance. Comments on the current status of the above high rise buildings were provided as follows:

- Anstey House & Gilpin House: no record of building control - procedural concerns.
- Hanover Point: awaiting information on this building.
- Rialto Court (student accommodation): working with the building owners regarding the testing of the cladding. The Local Authority are satisfied with the management arrangements, that the building is well maintained, and that there are good fire safety procedures.
- Nolan House & Hume House: Thirteen Group confident that there are no issues, but have agreed to tests for reassurance purposes (residents are aware).
- Elm House: now intentionally vacant, but a potential fire target - working with Thirteen Group regarding security.
- Kennedy Gardens (3 blocks): some of the cladding failed the Government test, and the removal of identified panels has started.
- Melsonby Court & Prior Court: rendered buildings, therefore low risk.
- Dawson House: brick and concrete construction - no cladding used.
- Anson House & Hudson House: some cosmetic changes made, but no concern.
- Bayheath House: brick on concrete - low risk.

Recommendation

1. **Ensure the Committee receives further updates from key partner agencies around the stated ongoing investigations of high rise residential buildings across the Borough.**

4.13 The Council's role around such buildings was outlined, including building ownership, planning, building control, and/or acting in a supporting capacity. The differences between planning and building control were emphasised:

| Planning | Building Control |
|---|---|
| <p>The planning approval process concerns matters relating to the impact a development has on the surrounding environment and its communities, such as scale, massing, infrastructure and flooding. Planning does not cover technical aspects/performance of materials used within a development.</p> | <p>This concerns the design and construction for domestic, commercial and industrial buildings. The Regulations are principally concerned with health and safety of people in or around buildings, the conservation of fuel and power, and access and facilities for people in or around buildings.</p> |

The 1984 Building Act introduced the opportunity for private Approved Inspectors to carry out some of the building control function. However, the enforcement powers remain with the Local Authority. It was noted that third-party building control had been used at Kennedy Gardens. Ultimately, since these legislative changes were made, the Local Authority's Building Control competes for work with the private competition.

Recommendation

- 2. Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Government is strongly lobbied to improve and strengthen building control mechanisms in relation to fire safety.**

- 4.14 Regarding schools, in order for the Council to understand the local response, Richard McGuckin has written to every Headteacher in Stockton-on-Tees asking for confirmation that schools have received the Department for Education survey, and seeking assurance that this has been completed and submitted. Daily updates are being requested and received.
- 4.15 For privately owned buildings, the Council is offering support to ensure that the right responsibilities are being fulfilled.
- 4.16 Some concerns have been raised regarding the GoWarm scheme, however, the cladding installed to many private sector properties as part of this is very safe and has been fully compliant with both the Building Regulations and Fire Regulations. A letter was sent to residents on the 21st June 2017 from Richard McGuckin addressing these concerns (see appendix 3).
- 4.17 Technical information around the different types of cladding/finishing was provided and discussed, and it was noted that insulation beneath the cladding at Kennedy Gardens was of a much lower combustibility rate than that which was on Grenfell Tower. It was felt that a lot of misinformation had been relayed in the media, and the importance of being clear around the technical aspects of cladding and insulation was of utmost importance. Indeed, the reporting of cyanide poisoning (from the burning insulation) as a factor in the Grenfell Tower fire had been taken out of context, as cyanide is often present in combustion smoke.
- 4.18 Excerpts from Building Regulations around external wall construction were highlighted.

External wall construction

12.5 The external envelope of a building should not provide a medium for fire spread if it is likely to be a risk to health or safety. The use of combustible materials in the cladding system and extensive cavities may present such a risk in tall buildings.

Insulation Materials/Products

12.7 In a building with a storey 18m or more above ground level any insulation product, filler material (not including gaskets, sealants and similar) etc. used in the external wall construction should be of limited combustibility (see Appendix A). This restriction does not apply to masonry cavity wall construction which complies with Diagram 34 in Section 9.

The Council are satisfied that there are no risks with the EWI (External Wall Insulation) Closed Render Finish approach.

- 4.19 The Government's current testing procedure focuses on cladding - however, insulation is not being tested, and this is likely to be the next question. The Council are already assessing insulation, and, as yet, no concerns have been identified.
- 4.20 The differing constructions of external walls were highlighted. It was noted that, if there is appropriate space around the building, a lesser grade cladding can be used for the first 18 metres (height), but that walls above 18 metres high must be clad in Class 0 (the highest grade) - the Council would like to think that the highest standards of cladding are used throughout, but there may be possible cost reasons for adopting different grades of cladding (where permitted). For buildings with less space around them, Class 0 cladding is required throughout in order to prevent the spreading of fire to other buildings. Regulations do allow for different cladding on different sides of the same building (subject to the proximity of other buildings).
- 4.21 The merits of some form of sprinkler system were put forward, which in effect can provide a backstop for poor workmanship (not that this should be condoned), and the cost of such systems was usually less than 1% of the total build price. The Council's Planning Committee have previously looked at stressing the need for sprinklers as part of any building plans, and there may need to be national legislation to enforce this.
- 4.22 Members noted that the Council will work with neighbouring Local Authorities to share findings and learning where appropriate.

Thirteen Group

- 4.23 In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Neighbourhood Property Team visited tenants in high rise buildings, and the Concierge Team increased their floor walks to three per day.
- 4.24 On the 19th June 2017, Thirteen Group responded to the DCLG regarding their cladding request - the only sample sent for testing was from Kennedy Gardens (three blocks) which is partially clad around balcony areas. In the days that followed, fire safety checks were undertaken on buildings in conjunction with Cleveland Fire Brigade, and Thirteen Group agreed that any building defects were to be reported as 'P1' (highest) priority to get fixed. An update was given to Kennedy Gardens residents regarding the situation, and the organisation continued to be inundated with queries from the Press.

- 4.25 On the 23rd June 2017, the Kennedy Gardens test results were received - the blocks were found to be partially clad with Class 3 cladding, which is combustible. Discussions with the Fire Brigade were held, and door knocking at Kennedy Gardens proceeded, with letters left in post boxes (revisited over the weekend in order to speak to residents). Vulnerable tenants were identified and instructed, with the 'Stay Put' fire safety policy suspended. A six-metre exclusion zone was placed around the three blocks, and inspections were conducted by the Fire Brigade - bin stores were locked shut, residents were advised not to use balconies, and windows in communal areas were locked. A 24-hour presence by Concierge Team/High Rise Support Team was activated, with the out-of-hours team responding to all requests. Ward Councillors were briefed.
- 4.26 The Chief Executive (Ian Wardle) of Thirteen Group is commissioning a thorough independent investigation into the issues surrounding the purchase and installation of the cladding at Kennedy Gardens which led to the wrong materials being used (Class 1 cladding was specified). They have asked a respected audit firm, Mazars, to conduct the investigation and to report back initial findings in weeks, rather than months. Its enquiries will be conducted at arms-length from all parties involved, including Thirteen Group, and the intention is to publish the investigator's report in part or in full, depending on legal advice relating to potential action. Members also urged the examination of Thirteen Group's own processes/procedures around the checking of the materials used in their buildings.

Recommendation

- 3. All key partner agencies to consider the outcomes from Thirteen Group's commissioned independent inquiry around the presence of Class 3 combustible cladding at Kennedy Gardens, and act where necessary.**

- 4.27 Further checks on other high rise buildings will also be carried out as an added precaution and tested in line with DCLG guidelines.
- 4.28 On the 26th June 2017, contractors started to remove the low-level cladding at Kennedy Gardens. Scaffolding is being erected for high-level cladding, though a completion date for the full removal of the cladding is yet to be confirmed.
- 4.29 The Committee were informed that the last fire risk assessment at Kennedy Gardens was undertaken in October 2016 - this identified minor remedial action which was subsequently completed. Kennedy Gardens is fitted with emergency lighting and undergoes weekly fire alarm testing.

Recommendation

- 4. Landlords to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of fire risk assessments, including that the building itself meets fire risk assessment standards, and that the responsibility of tenants in maintaining robust fire safety measures and timely reporting of any areas of concern to their landlord is reinforced.**

- 4.30 Thirteen Group are looking into the feasibility of sprinkler/mister systems - a presentation is scheduled for the 13th July 2017 to outline the pros and cons.

Recommendation

- 5. Committee recommends the installation of sprinkler/misting systems in all high rise residential buildings across Stockton-on-Tees.**

- 4.31 A Fire Safety Forum, comprising fortnightly meetings, is to be implemented.

Cleveland Fire Brigade

- 4.32 Following the events on the 14th June 2017 in North Kensington, a way forward was agreed with the Chief Fire Officer. All high rise buildings were inspected, and all properties were found to be broadly compliant.

- 4.33 On the 19th June 2017, a meeting was convened with the high rise landlords from across Cleveland – this had an excellent attendance. Landlords were informed of an Action Plan that was being implemented in all their properties which was to;

- Reassure residents in the wake of Grenfell Tower on high rise safety
- Provide fire safety advice and increase the Fire Brigade's Home Fire Safety Visit coverage
- Provide additional assistance to identified vulnerable people within the premises
- Provide the opportunity for Fire Crews to carry out re-familiarisation visits under S72d Fire Services Act
- Provide the opportunity to update information on premises with regards to accessibility for larger aerial rescue appliances
- Provide the opportunity for crews and landlords to test the dry risers within each premise

All landlords were requested to provide the Fire Brigade with their vulnerable people lists to facilitate specialist Home Safety Teams to make contact and conduct Home Fire Safety Visits.

- 4.34 Advice on the initial action required at Kennedy Gardens was provided, and a site visit was conducted on the evening of the 23rd June 2017 (the day the combustible cladding was confirmed). It was evident that fire safety measures were appropriate - assessment looked specifically at fire doors, with fire warning devices and emergency lighting also checked (these will be re-inspected as required).

- 4.35 The Fire Brigade increased the number of appliances that would be mobilised to Kennedy Gardens when a fire alarm is raised. This has been increased from five to 10 appliances, plus an Incident Command unit and supporting appliance, and two aerial appliances. There are a total of 21 appliances in the Brigade, therefore over half will be mobilised to this premise in such a situation. This increase was due to the confirmation of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) on the flats external facings.

- 4.36 Operational crews put together a programme to attend all high rise buildings in order to re-familiarise themselves with the layout of the buildings and make sure appliances can get within the vicinity. Members noted the prevalence of items/rubbish in close proximity to Grenfell Tower - clear access to buildings must be ensured.
- 4.37 The Fire Brigade are acutely aware of people's concerns, with priority to be given to sleeping risk areas. Communications with Ray Sullivan (SBC Building Control Manager) regarding the identification of other high rise buildings in the Borough is ongoing, and this may broaden the focus onto schools. Care homes and hospitals will also be inspected.
- 4.38 The change from the 'Stay Put' policy to a simultaneous evacuation strategy at Kennedy Gardens was noted - this was made due to the small chance of a fire breaking outside a window which could spread externally. However, this building is well managed, with good 'compartmentation', safe fire doors, and two sets of stairs. The fire evacuation strategy is not up to the Fire Brigade to decide, and once the partial cladding is removed, the advice would be to go back to 'compartmentation' ('Stay Put').
- 4.39 The Committee expressed their gratitude to the Fire Brigade, who conduct themselves admirably in very difficult environments. Local people have also recognised the job that the Fire Service provides, and their dedication is commendable.

Engagement with Residents

- 4.40 Members acknowledged that when events like those at Grenfell Tower occur, it can be difficult to get the facts across to residents. However, from Thirteen Group's perspective, there was an immediate focus on providing assurance to tenants, as well as having a strong presence on site - teams were mobilised on the Friday (23rd June 2017) following confirmation of the combustible cladding at Kennedy Gardens, as well as over the subsequent weekend. Ever since the events in North Kensington, Thirteen Group have been inundated with media requests, and understood the anxiety of residents.
- 4.41 Both Thirteen Group and Richard McGuckin were thanked for their work/communications in response to the situation at Kennedy Gardens, and on the whole, residents have also been pleased with how things have been handled. Concerns have been raised about the magnets accompanying the doors and the slight gaps between the door and floor (though gaps at the top of the door would be a bigger problem due to the level of heat higher up). Kennedy Gardens is certainly not a 'death-trap' as some have made out, and the presence of two stairwells (as opposed to one in Grenfell Tower), refuge areas (in case a fire occurs), and an exhaustive rescue plan were also noted.
- 4.42 The Committee heard that Thirteen Group staff were very visible at Kennedy Gardens and communicated with residents very professionally. Indeed, staff were under pressure from many residents who became cladding 'experts', and their efforts in dealing with this situation should be commended.
- 4.43 Thirteen Group held a Q&A session for residents in Kennedy Gardens (Block 2) on the 29th June 2017. This was a very positive meeting, with tenants reporting that they were pleased with Thirteen Group's response.

- 4.44 Members welcomed the safety checks in relation to vulnerable people. The Fire Brigade noted that two community safety hubs exist to work with vulnerable people, but that there has never previously been a vulnerable people list for those in high rise buildings. In response to a query around HMOs and the presence of asylum seekers who may not speak English, it was also highlighted that the Fire Brigade have a Communications Team to help relay messages to all residents regardless of their background/language.

Recommendation

- 6. The Council writes to all landlords of high rise residential buildings in Stockton-on-Tees to ensure compliance with fire regulations, which takes into account vulnerable occupants, information on which is regularly updated.**

- 4.45 The Fire Brigade's operational crews have worked with landlords regarding the circulation of information (evacuation/fire safety leaflet) to every resident.
- 4.46 It was noted that although a lot of positive information has been communicated to residents, it is difficult to prevent the creation and spread of false news/information, which can skew public perception and create additional issues for agencies.
- 4.47 A site visit to Kennedy Gardens was undertaken on the 5th July 2017 which gave the opportunity for Members to view the blocks' fire safety measures, and hear from residents directly on the response of local partner agencies following the Grenfell Tower fire, and the discovery of combustible cladding. During the visit, Members witnessed the ongoing removal of the partial cladding.



- 4.48 Members observed fire safety measures in relation to the building's rubbish chutes, the numerous fire doors and seals (with a one-hour fire resistance rating), green LED lights (which remain on in the event of power failure), and the two staircases (one for fire-fighting, the other for escape). The 'compartmentation' layout of the floors was highlighted, as were the number of fire/smoke detectors. Corridors are walked every hour (this is logged), and assurance was given that vulnerable residents are known.

- 4.49 An issue arising from Grenfell Tower was the lack of knowledge around who was in the building at the time of the fire. In terms of Kennedy Gardens, although door entries are monitored for security purposes, it is difficult to account for visitors to the building. It was noted that sub-letting is not as big an issue in Stockton-on-Tees as it is in London, and Thirteen Group are aware of who their tenants are. This information is shared with the Local Authority.
- 4.50 Residents representatives gave an insight into their feelings on the current situation, highlighting their initial shock following the events in North Kensington, confusion and upset when the combustible cladding was confirmed (after being originally informed that there were no issues), their relief when the cladding began to be removed and the implementation of a 24-hour security presence in the blocks. Their overriding message however was one of praise for Thirteen Group in terms of the speed with which they have moved, and the regular updates they provide. On the whole, residents felt safe, and the service provided by all partner agencies around the current issues was described as 'exemplary', particularly the efforts of the local Billingham Central Councillor, Barry Woodhouse.
- 4.51 Some concern was expressed around access to assembly points from block 3, which can be impeded by parked cars. In addition, uncertainty was expressed around whether all residents understood the fire safety procedures, particularly in relation to the usual 'Stay Put' policy. The Fire Brigade have made leaflets (see appendix 4) available to all landlords of high-rise buildings and crews will utilise them, when appropriate, whilst carrying out visits to these properties.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Members were reassured with the responses provided by all key local partner agencies following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, and it was clearly evident that a high degree of co-ordinated effort had been put into addressing the understandable concerns of residents of high rise buildings across Stockton-on-Tees. More importantly, residents themselves had expressed positive views regarding agency responses, in particular those of Thirteen Group. Partners should be commended for their approach in such challenging circumstances.
- 5.2 Agencies will need to react to the findings of Thirteen Group's commissioned independent inquiry into the presence of Class 3 combustible cladding at Kennedy Gardens, as well as potential issues with any other buildings (including non-high rise) that are/will be under investigation. As seen in the case of Kennedy Gardens, a strong, co-ordinated and well communicated response is very effective in reassuring the community.
- 5.3 Due to the scale of the disaster in North Kensington, the issue of fire safety resonates far beyond the boundaries of Stockton-on-Tees. The events of the 14th June 2017 have demanded a national focus, and local partners will need to be prepared to consider (and act on where required) the outcomes of the Government's forthcoming public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.

Recommendation

- 7. Consideration to be given by all key partner agencies on the outcomes from the Government's public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower, or any related, fire once available.**

APPENDIX 1



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Melanie Dawes CB
Permanent Secretary

Department for Communities and Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

To: Local Authority Chief Executives &
Housing Association Chief Executives
Via email

Date: 18 June 2017

Safety checks following Grenfell Tower

Thank you for all the work you have done with the department since the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower. I know that you are urgently carrying out fire safety checks on your tower blocks and ensuring the appropriate safety and response measures are in place. The Grenfell Tower police-led investigation is underway, but it will be some time before we fully understand how the fire started or why it took hold in the way it did. We know that in the meantime there is significant anxiety amongst residents about whether their own blocks are safe.

There has been much public concern and comment about potential flaws in the cladding that was on Grenfell Tower. While the exact reasons for the speed of the spread of fire have yet to be determined, we have concluded that there are additional tests that can be undertaken with regard to the cladding. We are therefore asking local authorities and other registered providers of social housing to identify whether any panels used in new build or refurbishment are a particular type of cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM). More details on how to identify this cladding are in the attached technical note and the Homes and Communities Agency can offer expert support in surveying your properties if necessary. It is important to stress that ACM cladding is not of itself dangerous, but it is important that the right type is used.

If you identify that cladding on any of your buildings is made of ACM, then a sample will need to be tested. We have put in place a testing process for any samples, which will be at no cost to local authorities and housing associations. Please contact the department at housingchecks@communities.gsi.gov.uk if you have any queries. In addition, we will follow up with you individually on the morning of Monday 19 June to establish if you require any further assistance. We have been working closely with the Local Government Association, the National

Housing Federation and the Homes and Communities Agency who can also offer you support. We will provide further information on Monday.

We are making this testing facility available to any other residential landlords and you should ensure that they are aware of this offer.

As well as this work I would remind local authorities that they should be well advanced in checking they have robust fire assessments for their stock. I should point out that assessments carried out to comply with the Fire Safety Order are unlikely to have considered the building's cladding. The Local Government Association's *Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats* remains the most comprehensive guidance on ensuring fire safety in these types of buildings¹.

Once inspections are completed and necessary work identified, DCLG will work with housing associations and local authorities to identify the most appropriate options for supporting funding

Thank you for all you have done so far.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melanie Dawes".

MELANIE DAWES

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/fire-safety-purpose-built-flats>

Annex A

Identification of Aluminium Composite Material Cladding

By the end of day on Monday 19th June, local authority and registered providers of social housing should:

- Identify and record the number of properties that are more than 18 metres high
- Identify and record the properties that have been clad with aluminium type panels
- Inspect those identified to establish whether they are panels made of an Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) and record this
- Use the enclosed return form - *New Build and Refurbished Building Information Check List* - to report all of the above findings for each building to DCLG at housingchecks@communities.gsi.gov.uk Please complete and return parts 1 and 2 by close 19 June and subsequent parts as soon as possible thereafter.

Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) is a type of flat panel that consists of two thin aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core, typically between 3 and 7mm thick. The panels can have a painted or metallic finish (eg copper or zinc effects).

It can be differentiated from solid aluminium sheet by looking at a cut edge whereby the lamination is visible. It may be necessary to cut a hole in a panel if a cut edge is not readily accessible.

On buildings with a floor over 18m above ground level, where ACM panels are identified, it is necessary to establish whether the panels are of a type that complies with the Building Regulations guidance ie the core material should be a material of limited combustibility or Class A2².

To allow for the identification of core materials we are putting in place Government-funded testing capacity that will allow a small sample of the cladding to be tested and its type identified. **From Tuesday 20th June onwards, where ACM panels have been identified, local authorities and registered providers of social housing should begin taking steps to establish that they are of limited combustibility, and to submit samples for testing. DCLG will provide further detailed information about the procedures for submitting test samples**

² Material of Limited combustibility as described in Table A7 of Approved Document B (Vol 2)

Class A2-s3,d2 or better in accordance with BS EN 13501-1

on Monday 19th June. If you have any queries, please contact
housingchecks@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Please get in touch right away if you require any further advice, or if you require expert support in surveying your properties.

APPENDIX 2



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Melanie Dawes CB
Permanent Secretary

Department for Communities and Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 2785
psmelaniedawes@communities.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/dclg

To Local Authority Chief Executives and
Housing Association Chief Executives
By Email

22 June 2017

Safety checks following Grenfell Tower fire

Thank you all for your continued work following the appalling tragedy in North Kensington. Our priority must continue to be checking on the safety of buildings and listening to and being open with residents, and reassuring them as much as possible.

My letter of 18 June asked that local authorities and other registered providers of social housing identify whether any panels used in new build or refurbishment are of a particular type of cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM).

The testing process for samples of cladding is underway and the attached note sets out the action that an independent panel of experts advise must immediately be taken if it is determined that the insulation within Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) is unlikely to be compliant with the requirements of the current Building Regulations. This advice has been endorsed by the National Fire Chiefs Council who will be circulating it separately to their members.

These interim mitigating measures must immediately be implemented to ensure the safety of residents, pending replacement of the cladding.

If you have any questions about the testing process for the cladding please email housingchecks@communities.gsi.gov.uk

If you have questions about the advice on action which needs to be taken please contact safetychecks@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

MELANIE DAWES

Annex A: EMERGENCY FIRE SAFETY REVIEW

If it is determined that the insulation within Aluminium Composite Material (ACM)¹ is unlikely to be compliant with the requirements of the current Building Regulations guidance, it is essential that you **immediately** implement the following interim mitigating measures to ensure the safety of residents, pending replacement of the cladding.

Interim measures recommended by independent panel of experts

Notify Fire and Rescue Service.

Inform your local fire and rescue service fire safety/protection department. Failure to do so may put fire-fighters as well as residents at risk. The fire and rescue service will carry out an urgent inspection with the 'responsible person' to ensure that they are identifying and introducing appropriate interim measures, as set out below. The fire service will carry out a further inspection once the interim measures have been completed:

- Check that the fire risk assessment has been carried out within the previous 12 months and that the recommendations within the action plan of the assessment have been completed; also, confirm that there have been no material changes (to the building, the fire safety measures or the occupancy) that could, potentially, undermine the validity of the fire risk assessment. If no fire risk assessment has been carried out, you must **immediately** arrange for a fire risk assessment to be carried out by a competent person (eg by a person who is listed on a register of fire risk assessors operated by a professional body or certification body, or, preferably, by a company that is certificated by a third party certification body, that is, itself, accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to operate the certification scheme). Guidance on choosing a competent assessor is here <http://www.cfoa.org.uk/19532>
- Engage with residents to ensure they fully understand the emergency fire procedures in the building, particularly the meaning of "stay put". Ensure that fire procedure notices are accurate.
- Check that, at ground level, or on any balconies, there are no combustible materials (eg storage of refuse) in the vicinity of the cladding. Ensure that there are measures to prevent combustible materials in such locations (eg by temporary barriers or instructions to residents). Instruct residents that they must not have any barbeques on any balcony.
- Check that all flat entrance doors, and doors that open onto escape corridors and stairways, are fire-resisting and effectively self-closing against any resistance of a latch (or, for example, in the case of plant rooms or cupboards, are kept locked shut.) For guidance on these doors, consult the Local Government Association guidance on fire

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, the core (filler) within an Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) is an "insulation material/product", "insulation product", and/or "filler material" as referred to in Paragraph 12.7 ("Insulation Materials/Products") in Section 12 "Construction of external walls" of Approved Document B (Fire safety) Volume 2 Buildings other than dwelling houses. (The important point to note is that Paragraph 12.7 does not just apply to thermal insulation within the wall construction, but applies to any element of the cladding system, including, therefore, the core of the ACM).

safety in purpose-built blocks of flats - <https://www.local.gov.uk/fire-safety-purpose-built-flats> - but, in general, doors that were deemed to be fire-resisting at the time of construction of the block will be satisfactory. Replace any non-fire-resisting doors (such as non-fire-resisting upvc doors) immediately with doorsets (i.e. doors and frames) that are third party certificated as providing at least 30 minutes fire resistance.

- Check all walls that separate flats, plant and store rooms, etc from escape routes to ensure there are no obvious routes for fire or smoke spread (eg, holes where services, such as pipes and cables, pass through walls).
- Check that any smoke control systems, including associated fire detection systems, are operating correctly.
- Check all facilities provided for fire-fighters, including fire-fighting lifts and dry or wet rising mains. If you have **ANY** concerns you should contact your local fire and rescue service, who will, if they have not already done so, carry out an inspection to ensure functionality.
- Ensure that there is sufficient roadway access and hardstanding for firefighting vehicles attending incidents and to be set up to fight any fire externally.
- Check that insulation or other materials that form the façade meet all relevant standards.

If the building is protected by an automatic sprinkler system (or equivalent fire suppression system) you might not need to take any further interim measures before replacement of the cladding.

If the building is not protected by a suitable suppression system you must consider the need for interim measures. The measures adopted need to be based on an assessment of the risk by a competent person, but the following must, at least, be considered:

- Residents to be advised to ensure all smoke alarms are present and working in their flat; to report concerns about fire safety measures in the building (eg presence of combustible materials in escape routes) to their landlord and, understand the purpose of any interim measures begin taken.
- Closure of car parks in which a vehicle fire could impinge on cladding.
- Provision of a temporary communal fire alarm system, comprising smoke detectors in circulation areas and plant rooms, and fire detectors (possibly heat detectors, rather than smoke detectors) in conjunction with fire alarm sounders in each flat. This will enable the entire block to be evacuated simultaneously in the event of fire. This option is unlikely to be suitable for tall blocks, in which a large number of people would need to use escape routes at the same time. The system may comprise a wireless system, using radio to link devices.
- Provision of a fire watch by appropriately trained patrolling security officers/wardens.

- In the case of the most serious risk, consideration must be given to moving all residents out of the block until satisfactory remedial work has been done.

APPENDIX 3



Economic Regeneration and Transport

Big plans for an outstanding Borough

My Ref: RMc/JE/DB
Your Ref:
Please ask for: Richard McGuckin
Tel: 01642 526709
Email: EGDS@stockton.gov.uk

Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

21 June 2017

Dear resident

I can confirm that the external wall insulation (EWI) installed to many private sector properties within Stockton-on-Tees by Community Energy Solutions (GoWarm) under the Government's Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme has been fully compliant with both the Building Regulations and Fire Regulations.

We all saw how shocking the events that had taken place in West London last week were. However the insulation system adopted in the London incident was a completely different system to the method of cladding carried out in Stockton-on-Tees. In all render systems applied to Stockton-on-Tees properties, the insulation material is sealed behind a fire resistant render ensuring the insulation is not exposed to any naked flame. The works were fully inspected by the Council's Building Control Service, and Building Regulation completion certificates were issued on the completion of the works.

I can also confirm that the fire that happened in London was in relation to a multi storey housing block and that the insulation was exposed to the open air as well as flames. The conclusion to this is that neither of these risks exist in the Stockton-on-Tees private sector housing stock that had EWI installed, and I am satisfied that the external wall insulation system is not a fire risk.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. McGuckin".

Richard McGuckin
Director of Economic Growth & Development



Fire safety advice for people living in high-rise accommodation:

Know your building evacuation plan. Make an escape plan so that you are fully prepared in the event of a fire occurring.

Ensure doors to stairways are closed and keep exits clear of obstructions.

If there's a fire in your flat, get out and raise the alarm. Ring 999, inform your neighbours and stay out.

Do not use lifts when leaving the building in the event of a fire. Always use the stairs.

If it is too dangerous to follow your escape plan because of heat and smoke, ring 999 and stay inside the safest room.

If you're trapped, keep the doors closed and use towels or bedding at the bottom of the doors to block the smoke.

On arrival, the fire and rescue service will provide on-site advice regarding evacuation.

If the fire is in another flat in your building, you are usually safest in your own home, unless you're affected by the heat or smoke.

If you feel you are in immediate danger, don't wait to be told to evacuate the building. Get out quickly and safely.

In the event of a fire, never assume someone else has called 999. Multiple calls to a fire are better than none at all.



Home fire safety in high-rise accommodation



Serious fires in high-rise accommodation are thankfully rare. High-rise buildings are designed to prevent the spread of fire and smoke and provide a safe means of escape for occupants and most fires are contained within the room of origin.

Protecting local communities

Cleveland Fire Brigade works with both partners and housing providers to ensure that all high-rise premises comply with Fire Safety Legislation and Brigade Officers undertake regular inspections of the buildings throughout the Cleveland area.

It is vital that people know what to do in the event of a fire so that they can protect themselves and their families. This is particularly important for the more vulnerable members of our communities, such as the over-60s, under-fives and people with mobility issues. This fire safety advice leaflet is intended to keep you safe should a fire occur.

