

Grenfell Tower

Purpose

For information and discussion.

Summary

This paper provides information on the work that central and local government have been doing following the tragic Grenfell Tower Fire to ensure that buildings are safe.

Recommendations

That the LGA Executive:

- i. note the LGA's work to date;
- ii. comment on the priorities for future work outlined in paragraph 14 and feedback views to inform our discussions with Government to help ensure the safety of people living in high-rise buildings; and
- iii. feedback any views to influence the initial meeting between lead members of the Fire Services Management Committee, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board and the National Fire Chiefs Council.

Action

Officers to proceed as directed.

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Background

1. In the early hours of the morning of 14 June a fire broke out at Grenfell Tower in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Although firefighters from London Fire Brigade (LFB) were at the tower block within minutes of the alarm being sounded, the fire rapidly spread throughout the tower block. 250 firefighters were involved in fighting the fire and rescuing the occupants of the block. At the time of writing there are around 80 people presumed dead.

Issues

2. The cause of the fire and the reason it spread so quickly through the tower block are now the subject of both an investigation by LFB and a criminal investigation by the Metropolitan Police. Media reports originally focused on the possibility that the external cladding applied to the building caused the fire to spread so rapidly, but there is currently no definitive explanation and will not be until LFB concludes its investigation, which could take a number of weeks given the scale of the damage to the building.
3. On 15 June the Prime Minister announced that there would be a Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower Fire. The Inquiry will be chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick. A short consultation on the terms of reference for the Inquiry has been launched. However, in general it is expected that the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will examine the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower, its spread to the whole of the building, and its effect on residents, including: the design, construction and modification of the building; the role of relevant public authorities and contractors; the adequacy and enforcement of relevant regulations; the arrangements in place locally for handling emergencies; and the handling of concerns previously expressed by local residents.
4. Given public concerns about the safety of other tower blocks, councils moved quickly to review fire safety assessments, relevant documentation relating to any refurbishments work, taking the advice of their fire and rescue services, and contacting residents to reassure them.
5. The Department of Communities and Local Government also surveyed councils to identify the number of tower blocks that may be at risk, while the LGA wrote to council leaders and chief executives about the steps being taken by the sector to reassure residents and themselves that a similar fire could not occur in their own tower blocks.
6. The possible involvement of cladding in the spread of the fire at Grenfell Tower has led to a series of actions to test the cladding on other buildings with a floor over 18 metres. On the 18 June DCLG wrote to all stock holding councils and registered social landlords outlining the arrangements it has put in place to enable aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding on buildings with a floor over 18 metres to be tested and its type identified. Of those tested to date all have been found to be of type ACM polyethylene (PE) and ACM fire retardant polyethylene (FR). Using this information councils have been engaging with their local fire and rescue service to review fire safety in relevant blocks and to seek advice on the requirement for additional fire safety measures.

7. Following representation from the Local Government Association and others and the advice of the Independent Expert Panel on Safety, established by DCLG, further testing will now be conducted to help landlords to ensure the safety of their buildings. These large scale tests aim to establish how different types of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) panels in combination with different types of insulation behave in a fire.
8. Once the LFB investigation is concluded and the cause of the fire is known, there may have to be changes to fire safety advice, guidance and procedures.

LGA Work

9. The LGA has been working to support councils and fire and rescue authorities in the wake of the fire to ensure that our member councils are equipped with the information they need to act swiftly, including embedding staff within DCLG to provide direct support to councils as part of the national team dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy.
10. The LGA has provided regular communications with Chief Executives, Chief Fire Officers and council leaders and created a Frequently Asked Questions page on our website (based on questions from councils) with links to relevant guidance, DCLG information and factual information about what we know so far. This is being regularly updated and can be found on the LGA's website: www.local.gov.uk/grenfell-tower-frequently-asked-questions-local-authorities.
11. The LGA has also been active in the media, including media releases and the LGA's Chairman appearing on a number of news channels. **Appendix A** summarises the national media work to date.
12. The LGA's Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) discussed the fire at their meeting in June. Following the conclusions of the LFB investigation into the cause of the fire there may need to be further updates to the guide published by the LGA in 2011 on fire safety in purpose built flats. Members agreed that a further report would be brought back to the next Committee meeting in September on the conclusions of the LFB investigation and what that means for fire safety going forward including any changes needed in policies and procedures.
13. The FSMC also agreed that an urgent meeting needed to be held between the Lead Members of the FSMC, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board and the National Fire Chiefs Council to look at fire suppression methods including sprinklers. That meeting should be taking place soon. **Members may want to suggest other items for discussion at that meeting, which could then make recommendations back to Leadership Board and the Executive.**

Priorities

14. The LGA identified three key and urgent priorities for our work going forward. These are that:
 - 14.1. National action now needs to focus on what needs to happen to make buildings safe, and move away from testing one tiny part of the system. This should cover

all landlords not just the handful of councils with relevant stock and those with Registered Social Landlords (RSL) with Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding in their area. Any future work needs to be well coordinated and prioritise those buildings at highest risk.

- 14.2. Building regulations and the wider legal framework relating to building control, fire safety and planning, must be reviewed urgently to make sure they are much clearer on what can and cannot be used on the outside of buildings, covering whole systems not just the external panels. That review should be independently led and involve local government closely, as well as those involved in practical application of the regulations to make sure they are clear and can be properly implemented.
- 14.3. Government needs to agree to find the necessary resources for any required changes, both for remedial work and for any new tighter requirements.
15. As further findings emerge from the investigation at Grenfell Tower, the LGA will consider how these can be best taken forward.

Financial Implications

16. Whilst there are few direct financial impacts for the LGA in the short term, we have diverted significant staffing resource to supporting this work already, and there are potentially very significant resource implications for councils which will become clearer as the full results of testing and the findings of the public and FBU inquiries become available.

Next steps

17. The LGA Executive is asked to:
 - 17.1. Note the LGA's work to date.
 - 17.2. Comment on the priorities for future work outlined in paragraph 11 and feedback views to inform our discussions with Government to help ensure the safety of people living in high-rise buildings.
 - 17.3. Feedback any views to influence the initial meeting between lead members of the FSMC, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board and the National Fire Chiefs Council.