

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING AND FIRE SAFETY ADVISORY PANEL** held on **TUESDAY, 17TH OCTOBER, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillor Meric Apak (Co-Chair), Gulbahar Begum (Co-Chair), Francis Dias, Gavin Haynes, Maria Jacobs, David O'Keefe, Thomas Watkins and Councillors Kemi Atolagbe, Anna Burrage, Pat Callaghan and Tom Simon

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Lynn Addis, Irene Awoto, Gillian Farrugia, David George, Ryan Heng, Dominic Johnson, Angela Rokad, Jo Rose and Councillors Siân Berry and Gio Spinella

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Adam Harrison
Station Commander Russell Darnborough
Gillian Marston, Executive Director Supporting Communities

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Housing and Fire Safety Advisory Panel and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from David George, Dominic Johnson, Ryan Heng and Councillor Gio Spinella.

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webcasting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live to the internet and would be capable of repeated viewing and copies of the recording could be made available to those that requested them. Those participating in the meeting were deemed to be consenting to being filmed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2023.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

6. UPDATING THE PANEL'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management

Melissa Dillon, Resident Safety Engagement & Government Lead, took the meeting through the report and she along with Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes, and Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Councillor Meric Apak welcomed the proposal to have an independent expert co-chair, and he felt that with him standing down as one of the co-chairs this would allow the panel to better hold him to account.
- The Council would be using its position as an early adopter to sound out industry experts on some of the advisory groups for government departments and the building safety regulator, British Safety Council, the National Fire Chiefs Council, University College London (where the Council has had historic links to their academic fire safety team), the building research establishment, along with and a range of other fire industry experts who've been advising government on the production of legislation to find candidates to take on the role of co-chair of the panel.
- The candidates would need to be able to help and advise the panel regarding the wide ranging areas identified in the Building Safety Act, the Fire Safety Act and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act.
- The proposal was that initially it was hoped that the independent expert co-chair would be in place for one year then the proposal would be reviewed.
- The Council was working with consultants to help it prepare its self-assessment and would see whether they would also be interested in undertaking the role of independent expert co-chair, even if this was just for a limited period.

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- The Panel had a membership of Councillors, residents, officers and the Fire Service as it was felt that having all parties involved as members of the panel would help improve fire safety in the borough.
- Officers agreed to set up a briefing session for new panellists, which would be open to all panellists to attend, to provide them with information regarding the operation of the panel.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (MD)

RESOLVED –

1. THAT approval be given to increase the number of councillor places on the panel to 7 and for 4 of the places to be for leaders of party political groups on the Council and the Green Party councillor and the 5th to be reserved for the Cabinet Member for Better Homes, as detailed at paragraph 2 of the report;
2. THAT the Cabinet Member for Better Homes to step down as co-chair of the panel from January 2024 and for the replacement co-chair to be an independent safety industry expert as set out in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 of the report;
3. THAT approval be given to adopt the remuneration proposals for resident panel members set out in paragraph 2.8 of the report;
4. THAT training and support for resident panel members be provided as proposed at paragraph 2.10 of the report; and
5. THAT approval be given to change the name of the FSCAP to the 'Housing and Fire Safety Advisory Panel' as set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management/Committee Services

7. FIRE SAFETY DELIVERY UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Melissa Dillon and Maria Jacobs, Head of Neighbourhoods, gave the following key responses to questions:

- There were still 76 high-risk actions that remained to be undertaken, the majority of which related to door repairs and remaining clearances. There were 26 no access cases that the Council was working to address, with the remainder having works scheduled for October.
- The current programme of works sought to address the remaining outstanding 9,000 overdue actions by Christmas this year.
- An action plan was being finalised by officers to seek to address all the outstanding works. The action plan had been shared initially with the regulator

to get their initial views. These views were now being considered and the action plan would be revised accordingly. The Council through its Housing Safety and Regulatory Board and the Regulator would assess the delivery of the action plan and the standards arising from the regulatory regime, and when necessary determine any need to change policy or practices. This information was being pulled together in an industry wide template and would be shared with the Panel on a monthly basis.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (DJ)

- The action plan sought to highlight the actions that had been undertaken by the council to deliver the outstanding work, provide data on service performance on an industry wide template, along with how future works would be undertaken. The work arising from the duties and regulations would be on-going which would mean that there would always be outstanding issues that needed to be addressed and highlighted in the work programme. It was hoped that for the one-off duties the Council would be able to achieve 100% of the requirements (e.g. the installation of hard-wired carbon monoxide alarms and smoke detectors and electrical testing). Though it was recognised that accessing tenant's homes was proving difficult (currently this figure was at 30%) and may mean that this could not be achieved in full.
- Once the action plan to address the remaining outstanding actions had been signed off by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Council then the document would be shared with councillors, the Panel and be available on the Council's website.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

- Officers agreed to bring a report to the next meeting of the Panel regarding the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms installation programme. The report would highlight the reasons for the approach being taken, movement from battery to hard-wired, the engagement programme that was undertaken with tenants, along with the challenges being faced with the delivery of the programme (e.g. access issues).

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (DJ)

- The Council's fire and building safety activities represented a significant investment of Housing Revenue Account Resources. The Council had allocated £296m to fire safety capital works since 2017, and had an annual revenue budget of £4.5m for fire and building safety work. The new duties and responsibilities had to be funded from existing resources (apart from the Chalcots and Cromer Estates capital works), by making savings elsewhere and by reducing budgets for other revenue and capital works.

- The Council had now established a team of 10 experienced Building Safety Managers as part of the Resident and Building Safety Team, and Building Safety Cases were being prepared in line with the required timescales.
- High rise building must now be registered with the Building Safety Regulator, and as part of the Council's review of its housing stock an additional 17 buildings were identified as now being in scope (167 in total), and these would be registered with the regulator by the deadline of the end of October.
- Officers agreed to provide Thomas Watkins with information regarding the height of high-rise buildings within scope of the Building Safety Act and how they were measured.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (MD)

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

8. FIRE & BUILDING SAFETY CHARTER ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management

Melissa Dillon, Resident Safety Engagement Governance Lead, took the meeting through the report and she along with Gavin Haynes, and Maria Jacobs, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Accessing tenants' homes has been a real problem in relation to the different work streams (30% no access rate), so the Council had been trying different approaches to getting the information across to tenants along with making the process for operatives easier to undertake without needing tenants to be present. These included putting letters in people's homes where servicing was overdue, installing universal key systems in street properties communal areas and TRA halls, along with piloting new legal processes so the Council could take tenants to court more promptly if necessary.
- Officers had been working with colleagues in adult social care and children's services regarding learning and training staff on how they should disseminate information throughout the system, how to ensure tenants knew what, when and where they should report issues, how officers then responded to these requests and how they should be flagged up as serious issues to senior colleagues. Though staff had undergone mandatory training, further work needed to be undertaken regarding how this could be taken forward for tenants and residents.
- If necessary the council could resort to using legal measures to ensure that tenants allowed access for the required statutory works. This could involve the use of injunctions and ultimately be considered a breach of their tenancy agreement, which meant that the tenant could lose their home. Before this was ever taken forward the council would ensure that due process had been

followed, which could involve consideration of a tenant's vulnerabilities and have an appropriate evidence trail of attempts that were made but were not taken up by the tenant, and that they were therefore refused entry.

- The service had appointed a member of staff that was reviewing all the communications that the authority had done to date across the access areas and the communal areas policy. Also, they would be looking at previous newsletters, how libraries could be used to help share information, and other wide ranging information matching that against the Council's statutory duty to communicate in particular way for particular purposes arising from Fire Safety Act, Building Safety Act and now the social Housing Regulation Act duties and responsibilities. Once this had been undertaken then they would come up with recommendations for the Housing Regulation Board for it to consider. This review would not impact on the publicity the Council would have to undertake in the meantime to meet its statutory requirements.
- The council had put in a place a fire warden training programme that was available to approximately 200 TRA representatives to take up. As part of this process, they would be given information regarding why the council needed access to homes to meet its new statutory requirements that they could then cascade within the community.
- Officers agreed to provide the Panel with a report regarding how it was seeking to take forward the issue of improving its non-access rate. The report would look at engagement processes, risk of non-access, legal processes being used, how it could be targeted, and how risk could be mitigated.

**ACTION BY: Director of Property
Management/Director of Housing**

- The current intensive engagement programme was being used to share information with tenants regarding allowing access to their homes, along with why the council was required to do these works.
- The Council was working with specialist third party advisors for the last 12 months to develop its approach to the implementation of the Fire and Building Safety Acts and its accountability framework. The next stage of this work was to carry out a third-party audit of the Council's fire and safety management processes, and introduce a fire safety management system that meets the requirement of British Standards 9997 (which only a handful of social housing landlords had sought to achieve). This process would provide evidence to residents and the regulator of the commitment of the council to provide resources, support and awareness to manage fire risk in a consistent way across the authority.
- Officers would provide Panel members with the outcomes report arising from the BS9997 process once it was available in November.

**ACTION BY: Director of Property
Management**

The Panel noted the work that had been undertaken in regards to electrical and other safety checks and the impact that non-access was having on this and other fire and building safety issues.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

9. REGULATORY UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Melissa Dillon, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council had submitted its Building Safety Case reports to the Building Safety Regulator for them to assess whether the information provided met the expected guidance. Should the Council be identified as not being compliant then this information would be shared with the Panel for information.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

- The development of the Council's Fire and Building Safety Charter meant that the council was already ahead of the curve in relation to the consumer standard information that would now be required from local authorities in the future.
- Officers were also developing an appropriate IT system that would be able to capture the required data and so make reporting it easier.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

The meeting agreed to receive further reports regarding Smoke/Carbon monoxide alarm installation programme, accessing homes and the BS9997 Standard. Officers would consider when these reports should be submitted.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

New items in bold

January 2024

- Fire Safety Delivery Update
- Annual report on the activity of the Fire Safety & Compliance Advisory Panel
- Compliance Performance Report (Standing Item)

April 2024

- LFB Annual Report
- Building Safety Act implementation
- Consumer Standards update
- Compliance Performance Report (Standing Item)

Yet to be Programmed

- **Smoke/Carbon monoxide alarm installation programme**
- **Accessing Homes**
- **BS9997 Standard**

RESOLVED –

THAT the work programme, action tracker update and dates of meetings as outlined above be noted.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END