



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

AGENDA PAPERS MARKED 'TO FOLLOW' FOR SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday, 17 March 2021

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Place: Virtual

The meeting will be streamed live at

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjwbIOW5x0NSe38sgFU8bKg>

	AGENDA	PART I	Pages
5.	ACM CLADDING		1 - 14

To receive a report from the Corporate Director of Place and Trafford Housing Trust.

SARA TODD
Chief Executive

Membership of the Committee

Councillors D. Acton (Chair), J. Lamb (Vice-Chair), J. Holden, B. Shaw, R. Thompson, A.J. Williams, B.G. Winstanley, A.M. Whyte, Dr. K. Barclay (ex-Officio), D. Western (ex-Officio) and J.D. Newgrosh.

Further Information

For help, advice and information about this meeting please contact:

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This agenda was issued on **Thursday, 11 March 2021** by the Legal and Democratic Services Section, Trafford Council, Trafford Town Hall; Talbot Road, Stretford, Manchester, M32 0TH

WEBCASTING

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Trafford Housing Trust – Update to Trafford Council Scrutiny Committee March 2021

1. Introduction

This report provides Trafford Council Scrutiny Committee with an update on the current position of the five Old Trafford tower blocks: Pickford Court, Grafton Court, Clifford Court, Empress Court and Princess Court. The report contains details on the site works and the progress to replace the defective cladding. This report should be read in conjunction with the detailed answers provided to the Scrutiny Committee, which were raised from customers living within the towers.

2. Overview

The Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- **NOTE** - The defective cladding has been removed from all towers.
- **NOTE** - All residents are safe and have been engaged throughout the whole process.
- **NOTE** - The programme of works has been accelerated.
- **NOTE** - Technical consultants/experts have been engaged at every stage of the project to ensure residents are kept safe.

3. Site works

3.1 Overview

In late spring 2019 works commenced on the cladding remediation project with an anticipated completion date of April 2020. This was always a forecast date as, until the cladding had been removed and the level of work assessed, it was impossible to accurately predict the length of contract. This was compounded by:

- The availability of experts to process items
- The supplier of new cladding system going into administration
- Significant delays and reduced labour due to Covid-19

Now the full extent of the work is known, as all the cladding has been removed, the Trust can accurately forecast the works will be completed across all tower blocks by October 2021.

Due to the delays to the project THT and Seddon Construction have worked together to ensure the remaining works can be delivered in the most time effective way possible.

3.2 Progress of the Individual Towers

The table below summarises the current position on site for each individual tower. This illustrates whilst the full works will not be completed until October 2021 a large amount of the planning works has already been concluded and the first properties will be completed in July 2021.

Tower	ACM Removed	New Designs Available	Remedial Work	New Cladding Installed	Expected Completion
Princess	✓	✓	✓	Underway	July 21

Empress	✓	✓	✓	Underway	July 21
Clifford	✓	✓	✓	x	August 21
Grafton	✓	✓	x	x	September 21
Pickford	✓	x	x	x	October 21

4. Customer Engagement

Throughout the process we have been in direct contact with customers, both through our high-rise living panel, customer meetings, and via post, and we will continue to do so. We are happy to meet with customers in person or virtually to discuss any issues they may have.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the Trust has undertaken a significant and technically difficult project to rectify the cladding issues at the five tower blocks in Old Trafford. All cladding has now been removed and the blocks have been made safe, the remaining works is to replace the cladding to re-store them to their original state.

In addition, we have undertaken level 4 risk assessments of all blocks and completed all recommendations made within these reports, as fire safety is a top priority for THT. We will continue to work with customers whilst works are completed and in the future to ensure the towers are safe place to live.

Graeme Scott

Executive Development Director

Trafford Housing Trust

	Question	Response
1	When did the advice from GMFS change from do not remove the cladding until a suitable replacement was ready, to it was safe to remove without a replacement? If this advice has since changed why has it not been relayed to the residents of the 5 tower blocks?	At the commencement of the programme of works and due to the availability of cladding professionals, it was anticipated that there would only be a maximum of two towers being worked on at any one time. In 2020, the Trust took the decision to change the approach to how the works would commence. This enabled the programme to be accelerated and allow all five towers to be worked on at the same time.
2	Why was there no representative from THT present at the last scrutiny committee meeting in March 2020 despite Iain Wallace's closing statement that they would be happy to attend any future meetings?	We are always happy to attend meetings and had planned to attend this session. Unfortunately the officer due to attend had last minute childcare issues. Whilst we were unable to attend in person we apologised and sent a written update along with the offer to continue to attend future meetings.
3	The latest correspondence from THT to residents, states that all 5 blocks will have the cladding replaced by the end August 2021, is this still the case.	We now have a detailed programme from our contractor and therefore have a clear timetable of when all the towers works will be completed. Subject to no further restrictions we can confirm that Princess and Empress will be completed in July, Clifford will be completed in August, Grafton will be completed in September and the final block Pickford will be completed in October. Whilst this is longer than originally anticipated this is down to a number of reasons including employing safe working practices in line with Covid-19 guidance.
4	Why was there no representative from THT present at the High-Rise cladding meeting held at GMFS headquarters on the 17/01/2020 which I myself attended.	We attend a number of fire safety groups/briefings to the Trust's knowledge, no invitation was received by the Trust for this meeting. We will always endeavour to attend meetings which are relevant to the services we offer.
5	Why was the cladding on my tower block Pickford Court only completely removed in January of this year 2021. The correspondence received from Iain Wallace dated 26/06/2020 states the pandemic and complex technical nature as mitigating factors. What are the specifics of these technical issues? The Pandemic has only been an issue since march of last year so what are the specific reasons prior to this.	The work to strip Pickford had been originally planned for March/April 2020. This work was completed in December 2020. As previously stated this was due to a number of reasons including Covid-19 delays, advice on the works from our experts and delaying the works whilst we understood the learnings from the first two blocks Princess and Empress, where the cladding was removed. I would like to apologise for this delay. At all times we have ensured customers have been kept safe through the appointment of a waking watch service. If the individual respondent would like more details we would be happy to meet to discuss this matter.
6	Can the trust confirm that the A1 non combustible Rockwool insulation currently at the base of Princess court is to be installed on the blocks, if so, can the trust confirm that this is the same insulation that has been installed beneath the render of the tower blocks and that it meets all of the relevant fire safety standards.	Replacement products, including insulation will only be installed / applied to the building where they conform with the relevant fire safety standards and also with approved document B of the Building Regulations. We can confirm that we have tested the material on the render side of the building and this passes the relevant standards.
7	What is the latest update on the installation of sprinklers within the tower blocks?	The Trust has not yet made a decision on the installation of sprinklers into the tower blocks at this time. The Trust is currently considering its fire safety measures across all its complex buildings including towers, walk up flats and sheltered properties. Once a decision has been reached on the best fire safety measures to apply, in conjunction with our experts, we will consult on this matter with all relevant customers.

8	<p>It was stated by the trust in the scrutiny committee meeting January 2020 that any resident that had concerns or wanted to be rehoused would be given the upmost priority. Whilst I have been placed on the THT internal Transfer list to date I have not been made aware of any suitable property within the Clifford Ward that is available furthermore on the housing options website my priority is only 4 which would does not suggest being a priority. Is there a reason for this?</p>	<p>Our agreed approach was that if someone wanted rehousing from a high rise due to Grenfell we would give them advice on routes to rehousing - if we found they had exceptional needs we would follow the allocations policy and request priority rehousing via THT's Management Move Panel. We would be happy to speak with customers to have a further discussion and see where we can help.</p>
9	<p>Can the trust confirm that the current fire alarms in the blocks are reliable due to the number of false alarms and attendances from the fire service within the last 12 months?</p>	<p>In the 5 towers we have had 11 calls in in total in the last 12 months. Whilst some of these have been false alarms a number have been in response to actual fires. In all circumstances the fire alarms and measures THT have put in place have worked effectively. The fire alarms are tested in line with industry standards and we can confirm they are reliable and working as we would expect.</p>
10	<p>Are the committee and the trust aware of the number of the call outs by the Fire service to the tower blocks especially the 2 instances on the Tamworth estate. In February 2020 there was a balcony fire which was discovered by myself and I alerted the Fire Wardens Directly but more importantly a fire in one of the flats in my block in July 2020 where the fire service had to attend then enter the flat to extinguish the fire and remove soldering belongings from the flat. These belongings were then left outside of the entrance to Pickford court with a crowd gathered pointing up towards the billowing smoke coming from the top of my building. On this instance my partner and my 3-month-old daughter who was born in May 2020 had to be woken up and alerted to the danger by myself. At no point did any body from the trust or fire service contact us to advise what to do. This has never been addressed by anyone at the trust. Can the trust provide the total number of call outs to the tower blocks along with all of the incidents reported and recorded in relation to fire safety of the blocks. I will myself be compiling an FOI request from GMFS regarding these.</p>	<p>The Trust can confirm we are aware of all call outs by the fire service including those mentioned by the correspondent. As stated above there have been 11 in the last 12 months. In all these circumstances the fire protection measures we have put in place worked effectively to prevent the spread of fire and keep our customers safe. We will re-issue information on what to do in a fire to ensure all residents have the most up to date information.</p>
11	<p>With reference to the statement made by Tony in the meeting 01/2020 "that perception is reality to the residents" could the trust clarify what their perception is of how their approach has been received by the residents? As a resident myself I can categorically state that the reality is that they have not communicated effectively, have been reactive and not proactive throughout and have failed each and every person that has had to endure this perpetual farce regardless of how technically minded they may or may not be.</p>	<p>Following Grenfell, the Trust immediately carried out level 4 assessments and we have since completed all recommendations made in the assessment. Fire safety is a top priority at Trafford Housing Trust, and that is why last year we established a new, dedicated Building Safety Team, becoming one of only a small number of social housing providers to have a specialist team.</p> <p>In addition, working alongside GMFRS we became the first organisation in the UK to achieve a new British Standard in fire safety: the recently introduced BS9997 standard was awarded after our Fire Risk Management Systems passed a rigorous series of inspections. Throughout the process we have been in direct contact with customers, both through our high-rise living panel, customer meetings, and via post, and we will continue to do so. We are happy to meet with customers in person or virtually to discuss any issues they may have.</p>

12	<p>Does the Trust and Trafford council understand the significant toll this has taken on the wellbeing both physically and mentally, not just for myself and my young family, but also every other resident that have been living in a high rise building with this cladding on for years since the Grenfell Tragedy and then for almost a year during an increasingly deadly pandemic.</p>	<p>We recognise and would like to apologise to customers that the process took longer than we would have hoped. There was a limited number of specialists and contractors to carry out the work, which resulted in a 'bottleneck' across the housing industry, delaying the start of the project. In addition, the outbreak of the coronavirus has caused additional delays, as social distancing for workers has provided considerable challenges for the construction industry. We can confirm all cladding has now been removed from each of the buildings and they are safe. We can also confirm that we intend to have all works completed at Princess and Empress Court by July 2021, at Clifford Court by August 2021, at Grafton Court by September 2021 and at Pickford Court by October 2021. We hope customers will be reassured by our responses, our industry-leading approach to fire safety and commitment to building safety and the wellbeing of residents.</p>
13	<p>What is the reason for the removal of the video of the last scrutiny committee meeting held 03/2020 and the previous meeting 01/2020 from YouTube? Luckily, I do have a copy of the January meeting for future reference along with the questions I asked at the March Committee meeting which as of yet remain unanswered.</p>	<p>The two videos mentioned are still available to watch on the Council's Main YouTube Channel.</p> <p>The 11th March 2020 meeting is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVyr9HTxRwY.</p> <p>And the 15th of January 2020 meeting is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVkvbyRnHs.</p> <p>When the Council switched to virtual meetings broadcast live using zoom a new YouTube channel was created called Trafford Council Meetings, which is now used for all council meetings held in public. The historical content has not been migrated to this new channel due to the amount of time it would take but the videos are still on the main Trafford Council YouTube</p>
14	<p>Now that the cladding has finally been removed from the blocks but no replacement is yet installed, can the trust confirm what effect this has had on the heat retention and energy efficiency of the tower blocks?</p>	<p>Whilst the cladding has been removed this covers a small percentage of the towers and there is still a render system on the remainder of the block. Therefore the removal should have little impact on temperatures. The Trust is always happy to talk to residents about this matter if they do have concerns.</p>
15	<p>What measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of residents from trespass on the scaffolding on the blocks. There have been numerous incidents where non residents have been able to access and scale the scaffolding.</p>	<p>The Trust have been working in collaboration with the main contractor and will continue to do so to ensure that, so far as is reasonably practicable, steps to mitigate the risk of scaffolding breaches have been taken. This has included reviews of potential access points and additional barriers installed at these areas. If any residents are aware of further breaches we would always encourage you to report this to ourselves and the police.</p>

I would like to know that beyond the scrutiny process currently ongoing there will be a thorough investigation as to the issues that have arisen technical or otherwise and that the focus once all of the blocks have been completed will be on accountability for these issues. Since the tragedy at Grenfell, I have raised issues with the trust on many occasions which in itself has been difficult for me to process. Since the last committee meeting there has been a world altering pandemic, we have welcomed a baby girl into our family in the knowledge that we would have to raise her in a tower block with ACM cladding on it with a deadly virus ever present (there is a story currently on the BBC website highlighting the effects of the pandemic on High Rise residents I would recommend that all present watch this). Then when she was 3 months old, we have witnessed a fire in the building where we live. Whilst I appreciate that there have been positive actions from THT such as the Fire Wardens who have been fantastic throughout I cannot and will not accept that things could not have been done differently and it is my opinion that a culture of dither, misinformation and mistrust exists within THT towards its residents. I feel that it has been assumed that people who live in tower blocks are all of a certain type and only have a limited capacity for understanding nothing could be further from the truth. We are as rich and diverse as the community in which we live.

THT understands this has been a difficult time for all our customers and we completely sympathise with the concerns you have raised. There have been no assumptions made about the customers within our towers, at any point, and all we have ever done is work towards making the towers safe places to live. THT have undertaken a number of investigations into the work completed on the towers in previous years to ensure we can learn from this and improve all the buildings we manage. We also welcome your comments in relation to the fire wardens and appreciate you recognise the positive steps taken to date.