

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 JULY 2019

PRESENT

Councillor D. Acton (in the Chair).

Councillors J. Lamb (Vice-Chair), R. Thompson, A.J. Williams, B.G. Winstanley and Dr. K. Barclay (ex-Officio).

In attendance

Jenni Seex	Legal Support & Complex Enforcement Lead, GMFRS
John Wildman	Watch Manager for Salford and Trafford Fire Protection Team, GMFRS
Tim Rhodes	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Richard Pollitt	Team Leader-Housing Standards & Pollution Control
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. E. Brophy, J. Holden, B. Shaw, A.M. Whyte and D. Western

9. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE 2019/20

RESOLVED: That the Membership of the Committee be noted.

10. TERMS OF REFERENCE 2019/20

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference be noted.

11. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 13 March 2019 be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No additional declarations were made.

13. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

14. RETROFITTING SPRINKLERS

The Watch Manager for Salford and Trafford Fire Protection Team and the Legal Support & Complex Enforcement Lead, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) gave a brief overview of a presentation on sprinklers which covered the way that modern sprinkler systems worked. The officers stated that there was an issue in terms of public perception of sprinklers whereby people

Scrutiny Committee
3 July 2019

believed that they caused as much damage as they prevent. The Committee were told that modern sprinkler systems used smaller amounts of water than the fire service would use if they had to put out a fire. The Committee were informed of a number of incidents whereby retrofitted sprinklers had saved residents lives and how the safety that such systems provided enabled elderly and frail people to stay in their home in safety longer than other options.

After the presentation a video was delivered to the Committee, the video covered the legal requirements regarding the fitting of sprinkler systems within England. The video stated that there were still a large number of people across the England living in blocks of flats which did not have sprinkler systems installed. The video showed the difference between a fire in a block of flats without a sprinkler system and one that did. In the building that did have a sprinkler system there was no loss of life, minimal fire damage, and minimal fire crew time compared to the other fire which resulted in deaths, a number of flats being totally destroyed, the full evacuation of the building, and hours of multiple fire crews time.

The video then went onto inform the Committee that modern sprinkler systems could be fitted with minimal disruption to the residents. It was no longer required for a building to be evacuated and residents rehomed whilst the system was fitted (which previously represented a large additional cost). The majority of high rise flats were suitable for the systems without any changes being made to the buildings infrastructure, the only ones that did require changes were those that did not have adequate water pressure. The video detailed a scheme which had been undertaken in Sheffield to retrofit a number of tower blocks with sprinkler systems. The scheme proved that systems could be installed within high rise tower blocks with minimal disruption and at a reasonable cost.

After the video the Watch Manager for Salford and Trafford Fire Protection Team informed the Committee that despite the video being almost 10 years old and the fire incidents being real there had not been great interest in adding sprinkler systems to tower blocks that did not legally require them.

Following the video Committee Members were given the opportunity to ask questions. Committee Members asked a number of questions relating to the regulations around sprinklers. The Officers responded that there had been no change to the regulations within the last ten years, even following Grenfell Tower, and that housing developers were unlikely to install sprinkler systems in buildings if they were not required to do so. There was a recommendation following Grenfell Tower that buildings be retrofitted but it was not a legal requirement and had little to no impact upon developers.

The Officers also informed the Committee that there were to be new regulations for care homes and nursing homes to have sprinklers due to the immobility of residents. This was of particular interest as it was vulnerable people who were the most at risk and therefore gained the most from having these systems fitted.

Committee Members then asked a series of questions relating to public engagement that the fire service had conducted around sprinklers. The Officers responded that the fire service was doing a lot to improve the public image but it

Scrutiny Committee
3 July 2019

was an uphill battle. They gave an example of a recent advert by an insurance company showing a sprinkler being set off by a mobile phone and causing damage, which had undone a lot of the fire services hard work. The Chair added that while the fire service did a lot of work around public engagement developers lobbied in opposition to proposals to the regulations regarding sprinklers due to the short term costs, despite their obvious benefit.

The Officers told the Committee that the government were looking to revise guidance and were currently consulting nationally. GMFRS was planning to respond to consultation that they felt the regulations on sprinkler retrofitting needed to be update. The Chair asked that the fire services send their consultation response be sent to the Committee once it was ready.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the presentation and update be noted.
- 2) That the Watch Manager for Salford and Trafford Fire Protection Team and the Legal Support & Complex Enforcement Lead, GMFRS be thanked for attending the meeting.
- 3) That GMFRS are to send their consultation response to the Committee for information once it was ready.

15. FIRE SAFETY IN HIGH RISE TOWER BLOCKS

The Executive Member gave a brief overview of the report which covered the 5 Trafford Housing Trust (THT) tower blocks within Trafford which had ACM cladding that was to be replaced by fire safe standard cladding. The replacement of the cladding was expected to be completed by February 2020. There had been the possibility of a privately owned tower block having ACM cladding but it had been found that this was not the case. During the time from Grenfell additional fire safety systems were put in place to ensure that the residents in the buildings were safe.

The Executive Member informed the Committee that he had asked THT why this had taken so long and had not received a full response. The Officer present stated that they had received a response from THT which stated that the delay had been due to issues in accessing funding as the Government had delayed releasing the funding promised in the wake of Grenfell tower disaster. The Exec Member suggested that the Committee have a meeting THT to answer questions as to why it had taken so long for it to be done.

The Chair asked about whether the Executive Member knew if THT were considering retrofitting Sprinklers. The GMFRS officers stated that they were aware that THT were consulting with residents in a tower block within Trafford and they were doing what they could to convince residents to allow a system to be put in place. The Executive Member asked whether it could ever reach a point where it was a matter of safety rather than requiring resident agreement. The GMFRS officers stated that THT would not be able to input a system without there being resident consent. If some say no it is then as to whether THT install the system in the rest of the building. The Chair proposed that a spotlight task and finish group be created to meet with THT regarding the changes to cladding, sprinkler systems,

Scrutiny Committee
3 July 2019

and general fire safety. The Officers from GMFRS stated that they would also be happy to attend such a meeting to add their perspective.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report was noted.
- 2) That a spotlight task and finish group was to be created to meet with THT regarding cladding, sprinklers, and fire safety.
- 3) That the Officers from GMFRS be invited to the meeting with THT to add their professional perspective.

16. DRAFT ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

The Chair gave a brief introduction to the report before asking Members for their questions and views on the report. One Committee Member drew attention to part 1.7 of the report which stated that due to the lack of resources resulting from changes in the team the Annual Scrutiny Review would not be held this year. The Committee Member put forward that this should be revised and that a review should be held. The rest of the Committee agreed to the change and the Chair asked officers to arrange the Scrutiny Review to be held as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be amended to reflect that the Annual Scrutiny Review would be held.
- 2) That Officers arrange a scrutiny review as soon as possible.
- 3) That following the above amendments the report be agreed and submitted to Council.

17. OVERVIEW REPORT

The Chair gave a brief overview of the report before asking Members if they had any suggestions for additions to the Committee's Work Programme. Councillor Winstanley requested for there be a task and finish group to be conducted looking at disability access. The Committee agreed to add the task and finish group to the work programme and Councillors Winstanley, Williams, Lamb, Acton, Thompson, and the Chair volunteered to be on the group. Councillor Winstanley then requested that this task and finish group be opened up to all Councillors which was agreed by the Committee.

Members then asked whether additional items could be added to the work programme at a later date and they were told that they could suggest additional items at any time.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a task and finish group looking at disability access be added to the Committee's work programme.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.01 pm