

KCTMO and RBKC

Meeting with the London Fire Brigade Fire Safety Team

20th July 2011

Present:

Ann Muchmore RBKC Performance & Contracts Monitoring Officer
Janice Wray KCTMO Health, Safety & Facilities Manager
Carl Stokes Fire Risk Assessment Consultant
Dave Green LFB Fire Safety Team Leader
Collette O'Hara LFB Fire Safety Inspecting Officer

1. TMO Fire Risk Assessment Programme – current position on assessments

1.1 Janice advised that progress remains within the timescales originally discussed with the LFB; specifically, Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) to be completed within 3 year period of July 2009 and actions required to comply with legislation to be completed within 5 year period of July 2009. Current situation is as follows:

- High Risk FRA programme completed March 2010
- Medium Risk FRA programme completed May 2011
- High rise blocks and those where works have been undertaken or where issues / concerns have required attention have been reassessed during the medium-risk properties
- Low risk FRA programme to be commenced in August 2011, anticipate completion March 2012.
- The resultant risk in FRAs undertaken to date have been "medium risk". Both consultants undertaking the assessments have confirmed that this is the lowest risk they allocate to residential blocks taking account of the potential fire risk from within the dwellings.
- It was further confirmed that any high risks encountered by the assessor during inspection are relayed immediately to allow urgent resolution.

2. TMO FRA Programme – current position on Action Plans / Recommendations (Significant Findings)

2.1 Janice outlined the procedure followed in relation to progressing action plan recommendations. Specifically, for each block the Action Plan is submitted as a separate document to the main FRA report. On receipt of this the H&S Team

allocates responsibility for each action to an officer / team and emails the updated Action Plan to those responsible for progressing items. Staff are required to advise the H&S Team of the action proposed, i.e. order number, timescale, date of letters sent, dates of clearance etc. – and the Action Plan is then further updated to reflect this.

- 2.2 The actions identified ranged from simple responsive and low-cost items – e.g. faulty closers on communal doors, inadequate fire stopping where cables had been installed, items stored in corridors, evidence of regular planned maintenance activities etc - to the need to satisfy ourselves that the flat entrance doors within enclosed blocks were FD30s fitted with self-closers, intumescent strips and cold smoke seals.
- 2.3 Actions are analysed for trends etc and where a trend is identified, e.g. a contractor repeatedly failing to complete work satisfactorily, the underlying cause is addressed and remedial work undertaken. Significant progress continues to be made.

3. Flat entrance door replacement programme

- 3.1 Once the FRAs started to identify the need to investigate flat entrance doors further we extended the work of our stock condition surveyors (who were on site) to include inspection of these doors. Based upon the results of the surveys it was clear that significant numbers of flat entrance doors did not meet the necessary current fire safety standards and could not be upgraded / refurbished to achieve these requirements and needed to be replaced. At this point we secured additional funding and used the London Housing Consortium to procure a specialist door contractor, Manse Masterdor. The contractor was appointed early this year.
- 3.2 As the FRA programme was ongoing we did not have a definitive list of every location where a replacement door was required and as such we could not be absolutely sure that sufficient funding was available for the entire programme. Therefore, the blocks were assessed on the basis of risk and a prioritised programme was produced. (The four higher rise blocks at Cremorne were given the highest priority.) Contractors have aimed to follow this programme in priority order, however, there have been some local issues which caused some blocks to slip down the programme slightly.
- 3.3 Janice advised that the programme is progressing well and at the most recent progress meeting on the 7th July the contractor confirmed that, of the 1100 doors identified to date, 340 replacements had been fitted. These replacement doors fully meet the requirements of the Building Regulations for fire, BS 476 and are fitted with self closing devices and cold smoke seals as well as being PAS 23 and 24 for security.
- 3.4 Janice further advised that some residents raised specific concerns about the security of these doors and the fact that they would not be able to fit additional

locks to them. However, the Borough's Community Safety Team has tried to assist us to reassure residents by confirming that these doors meet the Metropolitan Police's security standard for doors (PAS 24) and are also "Safe by Design".

4. Lift shut-ins – TMO Procedures

- 4.1 Janice advised that, whilst this was chiefly a matter that affected the operational LFB crews and about which she had corresponded with the Borough Commander, it may be useful for the Fire Safety Team to be clear of the TMO's approach to this issue. Specifically, now that the LFB had clarified that they will attend lift shut-ins only in cases of medical emergency or where those trapped are in significant distress, KCTMO contractors have been reminded of the contractual requirement to respond to all lift shut-ins within one hour. During the working day the lift contractors are generally working somewhere in the Borough and are able to respond to these calls swiftly. Outside of working hours there could be a considerable delay in the contractor arriving on site and we had tended to call upon the LFB to respond. However, our out-of-hours call-handling service has now been instructed to call out the lift contractors on every occasion. We have ensured that this approach has been widely publicised through articles in the residents' quarterly magazine and in the Resident Handbook. We are also investigating whether we can increase the amount of signage within the lift cars as, hopefully, this will reduce the incidence of residents calling the LFB directly from a mobile telephone.
- 4.2 Janice advised that both the TMO and RBKC requested that the LFB re-introduce the arrangement that existed previously whereby they advised us by e-mail (generally within 24 hours) of any attendance to a lift shut-in in one of our blocks. This was particularly helpful as it allowed us to investigate and instigate any remedial action promptly, i.e. before the lift could fail again, potentially resulting in a further shut-in. Janice confirmed that Brian Deans had agreed to ask his staff to advise us in this way, however, as we have had no contact for quite some time we are anxious that staff may not be doing this: Janice asked Dave to raise this issue internally.

Action: Dave to discuss with Borough Commander

5. Automatic fire detection – false alarms

- 5.1 Janice asked the Fire Safety Team to advise of the LFB's current policy on attending false alarms of automatic detection as there was much speculation in the media about possible charging and / or non-attendance. Currently the LFB does not charge for attending false alarms, however, it is possible that this situation may change.. Collette produced statistics recently produced by the LFB documenting the 40 blocks in the Borough which experienced the largest number of fire alarm activations and associated LFB attendances in the last year. These showed that there have been 21 attendances at 70 Tavistock Road sheltered block in this period. Janice was given a

copy of this information. To put this in context: a non-TMO block at the top of this list had generated 70 calls in the same period. However, Collette confirmed that LFB will be writing to us formally about this block, emphasising that it is our responsibility to manage the fire alarm system and asking us to examine existing procedures, investigate those flats from which most calls were generated and take appropriate action where necessary.

Action: Janice agreed to investigate the causes of the false alarms at 70 Tavistock Road and identify any action necessary to reduce these.

- 5.2 Janice mentioned a situation where an LFB Inspection Officer visited to investigate a block where several false alarms had occurred in a short period – however, the visit did not take place until six months after the false alarms. In addition, staff were not notified of the visit so were not present to answer any queries – which a tenant then attempted to answer..... Janice asked what timescale the LFB work to in these situations? How long after a spate of false alarms would an audit generally be carried out? It was agreed that in a situation like this it would have been helpful if a TMO Officer had been invited to attend.

Action: Janice agreed to establish whether any issues remain outstanding at this block.

- 5.3 Janice took the opportunity to advise the Fire Safety Team of our current procedure at this and the other TMO sheltered blocks and to ask if they were happy for us to continue in this way. Specifically, there is only one member of staff based there during working hours, and if the fire alarm is activated she immediately telephones the LFB. Outside of working hours the alarm is monitored remotely by our Community Alarm Service (CAS) who ring the LFB immediately when an activation occurs and despatch one of their team to attend the location and liaise with the LFB etc. It is not, and has never been TMO Policy to silence the alarm and investigate. Considering the staffing level at these blocks Dave's view was that we should continue with our existing approach.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 Trellick Tower Update

- 6.1.1 Janice advised that the major works remain on site. Almost all of the flat entrance doors have been upgraded and works are underway to upgrade the communal fire doors. Upgrading the communal doors involves removing the doors from site and installing temporary doors (with signs, closers etc.) until the doors are ready to be reinstated. Janice awaits a position update from the Clerk of Works and agreed to relay the information to Collette.

Action: Janice to provide Collette with an update of the current progress with Trellick Tower

6.2 “Broadly Compliant”

- 6.2.1 Ann asked if the LFB would be able to advise us in writing when they audit a TMO block and find it to be ‘broadly compliant’. Collette recalled that the request was made previously and though the LFB wanted to assist the issue had not been progressed.

Action: Dave agreed to investigate whether we can be advised in writing when a building is found to be ‘broadly compliant’..

6.3 Written advice / guidance from the LFB

- 6.3.1 Janice asked for clarification on which issues the TMO / RBKC could seek written support from the LFB when needing to impart safety information to residents. Collette recalled that a request had been made in relation to lessees’ flat entrance doors, and confirmed that this had been referred to the LFB Policy department who had advised that they could not assist. Janice reiterated that we require only a standard letter setting out the need for flat entrance doors in enclosed blocks to be FD30, and the importance of ensuring this to be the case. Additionally, Janice advised that we requested a letter for inclusion in a mailshot to residents at Trellick Tower regarding the dumping of refuse in the communal lobby – again this was not forthcoming.

Action: Dave agreed to revisit this and advise what standard paperwork the TMO could reasonably request.

- 6.3.2 There was some discussion about LFB leaflet and distribution throughout the stock. Janice confirmed that at the start of the assessment programme (in August 2009) we delivered an LFB leaflet to every resident in blocks of 6+ stories. However, it was timely to target more blocks. Janice agreed to assess how many leaflets would be required and advise Collette.

Action: Janice

6.4 Elderly / Vulnerable Monitoring systems

- 6.4.1 Dave mentioned the recent case of a fatality at a sheltered scheme at Hounslow and highlighted the need for our monitoring system to ensure fire activations always take priority over other calls and are never forced to queue for response. Janice confirmed that we are aware of the incident and had investigated the protocol employed by our Community Alarm System. The alarm operates via a single transmission path which is the technology currently applied to all sheltered alarm systems. However, the following safeguards are in place –

- Our call handling system is set up to prioritise calls received due to activation of fire alarms, i.e. if two calls are activated simultaneously from a scheme, one being a smoke detector or fire panel then this one will override the other call and present first on the call handling operators screen.

- Calls present in order of priority on the operator's screen with details of the location and sensor (i.e. fire sensor, smoke sensor, pendant, falls detector etc.), enabling the operator to prioritise calls received simultaneously.
- If an operator is in the middle of dealing with a call from a scheme and another potentially more urgent call (i.e. fire alarm) is received this will also present on the call operators screen with details. The operator then has the ability to either close or place the first call on temporary hold so they can deal with the second more urgent call.
- Agreed practice between us and Tunstall (with whom we share call handling) is to ensure that all calls are closed and – just in case of any human error – there is a default in the system that visually and audibly flashes up any calls left open.

6.4.2 We are confident that these measures are robust and will ensure that a fire alarm activation anywhere we monitor will be highlighted immediately and dealt with appropriately.

6.5 Allocations Policy

6.5.1 Dave asked if the TMO screens potential residents and houses them accordingly. In particular, would we be aware if potential residents were known to have a history of arson? Ann advised that the Council (not the TMO) is responsible for allocations. Applicants for housing must be deemed "fit for independent living" and beyond that an allocation is made solely on the basis of housing need. However, the housing register has an alert system to identify those applicants who have support issues, and an advocate and/or support officer will be contacted regarding potential offers of accommodation.

6.5.2 There was some discussion about how much we know about the vulnerability / disability of the residents in RBKC properties, and Janice advised that we had recently undertaken an initiative to gather more information of this nature. (This will allow us to establish were individuals require a PEEP.)

6.6 Buildings over 18 metres without a dry riser

6.6.1 Dave asked if operational crews have been advised of the locations of those buildings 18 metres in height but where no dry riser was installed at the time of construction. Janice said she was confident that the crews are aware of these but just in case she agreed to advise the local Station Managers. Specifically, there are only five TMO blocks that fall into this category -

Lonsdale House, Portobello Court Estate, W11

Lacland House, Cremorne Estate, SW10

Riley House, Cremorne Estate, SW10

Gillray House, Cremorne Estate, SW10

Milmans House, Cremorne Estate, SW10

Action: Janice to remind the local LFB Station Managers of the absence of a dry riser at these blocks

6.7 Deficiency Notices

6.7.1 Janice asked if Deficiency Notices could contain as much detail of the deficiencies as possible as this makes it easier to progress them swiftly. One or two Notices received recently were quite vague, just citing a fairly general extract from the RRO.

6.8 Security Gates

6.8.1 Janice will continue to advise the local station commander where it is identified that a tenant has installed a security gate in front of their flat entrance door. This information could come from the fire risk assessment or from a caretaker undertaking his/her checks. Collette agreed to advise Janice of the contact details of the Station Manager at Chelsea Fire Station.

Distribution:

Those Attending

Lornette Pemberton