

15 May 2023

TITLE OF REPORT: Building Safety Update

Purpose of Summary

1. To provide an update on the current position of Building Safety performance.

Background

2. The operational part of the Building Safety Team was brought into Construction Services last summer as part of the Service Improvement Plan. This is to enable closer working between teams and more effective delivery of operations.

Key Areas

Fire Risk Assessments

3. All high-rise block fire risk assessments are within their required completion timescales. Two midrise block fire risk assessments are out of time awaiting completion, but fire safety visits have been carried out as an interim measure.
4. 242 low risk remedial actions are awaiting completion. A Building Maintenance Team has been formed within Construction Services and will take control of these from June 2023.
5. Public Building fire risk assessments are within their required completion timescales, including all maintained schools.
6. There have been some delays in the roll out of the NEC (Northgate) fire risk assessment software. This is expected to be resolved by June and in the interim the team continue to use a combination of standalone software solutions.

Fire Safety

7. In line with the Building Safety Act 2022 and the amendments to fire regulations from the Fire Safety Act 2021 external wall surveys are in progress throughout the high-rise domestic buildings.
8. The programme is on target with 12 of 24 blocks completed to date. Whilst third party assessment and certification are required the team has made significant savings using internal fire engineer resource.
9. The cost of the external wall programmes is £30k to date with a further projected spend of £80k in the current financial year. This is less than the £400k quotes provided by external contractors.
10. Significant fire safety work has been completed to Angel Court to remedy inherent defects due to poor quality construction at a cost of £370k.

11. Fire strategies have been completed at no additional cost using inhouse resource to make significant savings against contractor estimates of £120k or £5k per high rise block.
12. Gateshead Council joined a Building Safety Case pilot programme with the Health and Safety Executive last year. The first Building Safety Case reports are expected to be ready for submission to the Building Safety Regulator in May 2023. The cost of this is expected to be £1500 per block.
13. The Building Safety Act 2022 requires all buildings above 7 storeys / 18m with at least two residential units to have an ongoing safety case that details fire and structural safety information. The Regulator will regularly request and audit these reports to ensure ongoing compliance.
14. In accordance with new Building Safety legislation all high-rise blocks will be registered with the Building Safety Regulator in April 2023 at a cost of £251 per block. A building assessment certificate will be issued following audit of each safety case report which permits ongoing occupation of the building. Full roll out of certificates may take up to five years.
15. The team continue to provide fire safety visits across the Council property portfolio including schools, care homes and public buildings, and to community asset transfers and non-domestic lettings.

Asbestos

16. The rolling programme of asbestos surveys and inspections is on target.
17. Key risks found to date include asbestos containing materials in poor condition found during invasive fire risk assessments in the basement of Melbourne and St Cuthberts Court high-rise blocks. The areas have been restricted until remedial action is completed.
18. Work to investigate potential unsafe asbestos containing materials in the roof spaces of 403 butterfly properties are in progress. A design commission was raised for sealing off the lofts in early 2022. Whole house destructive testing and stripping out has been completed on a pilot property. This has informed a wider design commission that will reduce the risks associated with the asbestos, support the delivery of future major investment work, and reduce disruption to residents through repeat visits. A revised commission and design will be completed in Quarter 1 of 2023/24 with work starting later in the year, with programming aligned to the phasing of future major investment work.

Electrical Safety

19. 98% of 18,796 domestic properties have a fixed wire testing certificate. This is inline with the Council's five-year rolling programme. We are currently in year five.
20. 456 properties have certification that is over the recommended five years. These properties are within the current year programme and include 200 multiple no access addresses.
21. Communal area fixed wire testing is now with the Building Maintenance Team for a planned programme.

22. A programme of works is awaited for all resulting remedial actions. Any urgent repairs are carried out at the point of the inspection.

Gas Safety

23. At the end of March all Council owned domestic properties had a valid gas service record.
24. 972 gas repairs had been completed, 926 new boilers installed, and 134 gas fires removed.
25. All solid fuel heated properties had received their annual service.
26. 136 low priority remedial actions are in progress of being set up as an NEC work programme. These relate to associated electrical upgrades.
27. Changes to operational gas safety practices have been implemented in all teams. Six incidents have been prevented due to this. Training is being delivered to all Site Managers and contractors to ensure the new practices are in place.

Lifts

28. Lifts are currently a risk due to late servicing or data from contractors not updated on the NEC system.
29. 1 of 64 passenger lifts was serviced late during March. This is under review with Kone.
30. Domestic lift servicing is under review with contractors due to inconsistent use of the NEC portal and persistent access refusal by residents. Confirmed data reports: stairlifts 611 of 639 completed, hoists 56 of 70 completed, bath lifts 9 of 10 completed and platform lifts 24 of 38 completed.

Water Safety

31. A risk assessment programme is in place for domestic buildings but is not yet in progress other than to medium risk properties – there are no high risk properties in the Council portfolio. The Council has been unable to attract external contractors or recruit to internal vacancies. Recruitment has entered its eighth round of adverts.
32. Properties that have water tank fed systems have had water samples tested to confirm that there are no uncontrolled hazards. Empty properties have had water samples tested to confirm that they continue to be of low risk.
33. Schools and public buildings, along with Community Asset transfers are within a reactive programme. A full review of existing SLAs and servicing programmes is planned for the second quarter of the new financial year.

Damp Mould and Condensation

34. In line with the Council commitment to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up a new process is in place that involves repairs teams, asset management, housing management and external support resources.

35. Overall, the Council has 1712 known cases of damp mould and condensation that are in progress of resolution. 1228 have been reported since November 2022. 1143 cases have been resolved to date. 525 mould wash downs have been raised as an interim measure with 366 completed.
36. At the end of March ten positive input ventilation units had been installed into properties with persistent mould. We are procuring additional stock to instal into our empty properties as part of the completed works specification.
37. A PIV continuously draws fresh air through a filter into a property to dilute moisture laden air and reduce the levels of mould spores and condensation.

Recommendation

38. To consider this report and provide any questions and comments.

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