



# Warwickshire County Council Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC Member Briefing

## Fire Safety in Warwickshire's Residential High Rise Buildings

Briefing	Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC – 'Fire Safety in Warwickshire's Residential High Rise Buildings'
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### Introduction

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an update to the WCC Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC regarding the provision of fire safety arrangements within Warwickshire's residential high rise premises. This briefing will provide a follow up to work that has been outlined in various reports, specifically the briefing provided to WCC on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Further, it has been requested that this briefing provides focus on work carried out by residential high rise landlords in particular District and Borough Councils with landlord responsibility for high rise housing stock.

### Background

Due to the unusual and rapid external fire spread that occurred during the Grenfell Tower fire concerns were raised about the type of external cladding that was used on the building. The Tower was clad with a product called Aluminium Composite Material. Following Government direction all residential high rise buildings in Warwickshire have been inspected by owners and landlords and no cladding of that type has been found.

As an immediate consequence of the tragedy, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) tasked FRS's nationally to gather intelligence and identify all high rise premises within their boundaries of responsibility. To audit and inspect all residential high rise buildings within their authority and gauge compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO).

There are relatively low numbers of high rise premises within Warwickshire where only 19 residential high rise buildings have been identified. The following list defines numbers, location and the respective landlord group of residential high rise premises located within Warwickshire:

- 9 - Warwick District Council
- 5 - Rugby Borough Council
- 5 - Privately owned residential premises, Leamington

### Fire Safety Commentary

WFRS's Fire Protection team were directed by CFO Andy Hickmott to carry out fire safety Inspections of all high rise premises within Warwickshire. This work has now been completed in conjunction with the responsible LA and/or private sector landlords. There has been some non-compliance and work is ongoing to ensure that fire safety standards are compliant. Any breaches or non-compliance of fire



safety provisions found during inspections have been communicated to the appropriate responsible person(s) via a fire safety compliance check report. Following inspection meetings have been held with every responsible person to discuss their individual fire safety arrangements so that fire safety solutions can be found and agreed.

High rise themed meeting continue to be held with District and Borough Council housing officers and private sector landlords to share learning, discuss fire safety issues in general and agree how the group can continue to work together to enhance fire safety standards going forward in a collaborative and mutually supportive environment.

### **Warwickshire Residential High Rise Landlords**

Rugby Borough Council (RBC) and Warwick District Council (WDC) have provided reports for their respective members outlining the current high rise position and plans to implement development initiatives. Local Authority and private sector landlords have engaged with residents of their building to ensure that they fully understand emergency fire procedures in their buildings.

Warwick District Council is the responsible landlord for 9 residential high rise buildings. Following inspection and meetings all life safety issues have been resolved either temporarily or permanently. A full refurbishment of Radcliffe Gardens is nearing completion and has been used as a test site for the all the work in the subsequent buildings. The remaining 8 will then follow suit in due course. There have been regular meetings between WFRS Fire protection department and representatives from WDC. A very beneficial, positive and proactive relationship has been built and sustained during this time which has assisted the progress with in these buildings.

Rugby Borough Council is the responsible landlord for 5 residential high rise buildings. Again, a very good relationship has been built between WFRS and representatives of RBC which has allowed positive and open dialogue to investigate and resolve or move forwards issues. All life safety issues have been resolved either temporarily or permanently.

Surveys of 2 premises from their portfolio indicated possible structural issues within the buildings. Through consultation with the Protection Team, RBC have commissioned further professional support in the form of BRE, Fire Engineering & Fire Risk Management consultants and insurers to assist RBC to better understand the significance of the issues highlighted and public safety. From this work RBC made the decision to revise the fire safety strategy for all 5 premises to one of full evacuation with a waking watch. The occupants of 2 of the premises are being found alternative accommodation as demolition, regeneration or major reinforcement and refurbishment will need to be carried out. The future of these two blocks and the other 3 are to be discussed during a full council meeting.

There are a further 5 residential high rise buildings under the ownership of private landlords located in the Leamington Spa area. The majority of life safety issues have been resolved either temporarily or permanently. Relationships with responsible bodies, normally residents groups vary from very good to reasonable. Funding is not as freely available to this group as local authority housing bodies therefore work timetables have been extended.

Due to the size and nature of these buildings much of the required work would have significant completion times. The national demand for contractors and resources has been unprecedented and this has further impacted on time frames for works. For these reasons we have had to manage our



expectations. Where responsible persons have been working with us and showing sustained and reasonable progress suitable allowances have been made to time scales for completion of work.

### **Future Considerations**

The Government commissioned Dame Judith Hackitt to carry out a review of Building Regulations. This work has now been completed and the final report 'Building a Safer Future - Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety' has been submitted to HM Government for consideration.

The subject matter is complex and the implication upon a wide range of responsible groups and individuals is yet to be fully understood. The key points from the report that may be of interest and borne in mind prior to the Government deciding to put in place an implementation plan are as follows:

- The current system of building regulations and fire safety is not fit for purpose and a culture change is required.
- The current package of regulations and guidance can be ambiguous and inconsistent.
- Processes that drive compliance within building safety requirements are weak and complex.
- A new regulatory framework is proposed.
- A regulator for the whole of the building in relation to fire and structural safety developed.

The Government has committed to bring forward legislation that delivers meaningful and lasting change, and ensures residents have a much stronger voice in an improved system of fire safety. The DHCLG is also working with industry to clarify Building Regulations fire safety guidance, and will publish this for consultation during 2018.

It is highly likely that there will be impacts upon all Fire Services & LA departments but this may take time to materialise. WCC will need to understand the resource requirements to provide the capacity and competencies needed to take on the additional roles and responsibilities. There will be an expectation that WFRS will provide capacity and expertise to support a range of additional fire safety responsibilities.

At this time WCC should keep abreast of developments and guidance and have a level of positive self-awareness so that there is an understanding of resource capabilities required in the future.

### **Sprinklers and Fire Suppression**

WFRS consistently offer goodwill advice to Building Control bodies and Approved Inspectors where the installation of sprinkler fire suppression systems are strongly recommended even where there is no requirement for installation into new building developments. Sprinklers enhance life safety and protect valuable structural built assets.