

Cabinet Addendum Sheet

22 June 2017



Classification: Public

ITEM 9 - BUDGET OUTTURN 2016/17

New recommendation 10

In respect of the Council's response to the Grenfell Tower Fire in London, that Cabinet:

- a) **Ratifies a decision taken by the Leader of the Council on 20 June 2017 to authorise the purchase of fire doors from Gerda at a cost of circa. £2.2m using existing capital funds in order to protect and safeguard council properties and residents.**
- b) **Notes that the Leader of the Council may decide to make further use of his exceptional powers in the Constitution to ensure the Council is taking every step possible to reassure and ensure that residents are safe and secure in their homes, following the aftermath of this terrible incident.**
- c) **Agrees that the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be delegated all necessary authority from the Cabinet required to carry out any actions or changes to housing fire safety related services, works, policies and procedures and to incur any necessary expenditure to give effect to this within available budgets.**
- d) **Agrees that a comprehensive update report be presented to Cabinet in due course on the actions the Council has taken to keep both Members and local residents reassured and well informed.**

Supporting information

Hillingdon Council is working to do all it can to keep residents safe from the risk of a major fire. For Council tenants and leaseholders living in flats there are regular inspections of communal areas to make sure that fire safety standards are complied with (e.g. fire doors are not wedged open) and to provide regular reminders about fire safety such as making sure tenants and leaseholders test their smoke alarm regularly and keep passage ways clear. In view of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, the Council has undertaken an urgent review of fire safety measures in place in the Borough's tower blocks, which have all been visited.

To ensure that the Council is robust in tackling the risk from fire, a rolling programme of independent Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) is in place for all sheltered housing and tower blocks to identify any hazards and those people who may be at risk, in line with legislation. All Fire Risk Assessments were completed in the last two years and are scheduled for completion again this year.

From the FRAs, and on the advice of the London Fire Brigade, remedial works have been identified, prioritised and a programme of works is already in place and being implemented to reduce the risk of fire. During the past year Hillingdon Council has prioritised improvement works including new fire alarms, emergency lighting systems and new door sets for residential and communal areas in sheltered housing. In addition, in May 2017, the Council undertook an independent assessment of all high rise block fire doors which has informed the recommendation to replace these doors and the specification for these works.

In reviewing how the Council's efforts could be expedited further, the Leader of the Council made a decision on 20 June 2017 to bring forward the fire door works by procuring around £2.2m for fire safety doors to ensure the safety of residents and in line with the recommendation from the Fire Risk Assessments. As the review of the existing planned maintenance programme continues, other scheduled works may be brought forward also. The Council may also need to respond promptly to any immediate recommendations and lessons learned from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

The Council has well established decision-making procedures in the Constitution, along with both special urgency and emergency mechanisms. These enable Cabinet Members to respond very effectively to unfolding events. It is therefore, quite possible that further swift decisions are required by the Council in the coming weeks and months in relation to fire safety issues.

Cabinet is asked to note that the Leader of the Council may decide to invoke further use of his emergency delegation in the Constitution. This is for exceptional use as follows:

*"In the event of extreme weather and incidents affecting the Borough (not declared major incidents where other civil contingency procedures will apply) and **in order to safeguard and protect residents and services**, to give informal sign-off for any decision ordinarily reserved to Cabinet Members or the Cabinet when recommended by the relevant Corporate Director and that all such decisions taken be reported to a subsequent Cabinet meeting for formal ratification to ensure transparency."*

Members will know that in event of any Major Incident declared or national emergency, established civil contingency procedures are initiated, in order to make swift operational decisions by blue-light services and the Council's own dedicated Emergency Response Team. However, in the immediate recovery period and thereafter, use of the Leader's emergency power can supplement efforts and provide further flexibility to respond to matters affecting residents. Such decisions are reported to Cabinet retrospectively.

Furthermore, Cabinet is asked to give the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services, with informal sign-off by the Leader of the Council, full authority to make any operational changes required to housing fire safety related services, policies, procedures and works. This will be beneficial if any immediate changes are made to regulations or practices.

It is also proposed that an information report will be presented to Cabinet in due course to provide a useful update to both Members and residents, including details of any key decisions taken by the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services outlined above.

Members may be interested to know that neighbouring local authorities have now been asked to provide some specific staffing resource to assist in the Response Team following the incident. From Hillingdon, officers from the Homelessness Prevention and Allocations Team, Adults and Children's Services, the Contact Centre, Benefits and Technical Administration Teams along with some of our Emergency Response Officers are now working as part of the Community Assistance Centre, supporting residents affected by this terrible fire at Grenfell Tower.