

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Audit, Governance and Standards Committee – 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2019

### Fire Safety Management

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillors Fran Smith and Marcus Kravis

Report Author: Derek Quick, Property Compliance Specialist

#### 1 Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to address the committee's concerns from meeting of 26 June, 2019, with regard to Fire Safety Management across domestic and commercial portfolios, and based on the follow-up review which identified a number of outstanding issues.

It is important to recognise that good progress has been made in matters of Fire Safety over the past three years, that the council was already working to address identified issues prior to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and that all Fire Risk Assessments are in place, across all portfolios.

However, we accept there remains more to be done, and recognise there are further areas for improvement identified by way of the audit process. Post transformation, we have continued to refine our processes, and further developing action plans off the back of those process. We have a programme of Fire Risk Assessments and Reviews set to be launched in August, 2019 – further detail in para 3.3

We are also closely monitoring how the Grenfell Enquiry led by Dame Judith Hackitt will impact on the council, and in light of the government's consultation paper on report, looking at further staffing arrangements to better monitor and enforce failings in matters of Fire Safety, as well as engaging with residents.

#### 2 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

##### Risk Matrix

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Risk: Staff retention, disruption and training requirements	3	4	12

<i>Head of Function and people managers to ensure that qualified persons are retained / recruited to offset training and delays in programme</i>	2	3	6
--	---	---	---

### Risk Scoring Matrix

<b>Likelihood</b>	5	Almost Certain	Low (5)	Medium (10)	High (15)	Very High (20)	Very High (25)
	4	Likely	Low (4)	Medium (8)	Medium (12)	High (16)	Very High (20)
	3	Possible	Low (3)	Low (6)	Medium (9)	Medium (12)	High (15)
	2	Unlikely	Low (2)	Low (4)	Low (6)	Medium (8)	Medium (10)
	1	Rare	Low (1)	Low (2)	Low (3)	Low (4)	Low (5)
			1	2	3	4	5
			Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Catastrophic
			<b>Impact</b>				

<b>Likelihood of risk occurring</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description (chance of occurrence)</b>
1. Very Unlikely	May occur in exceptional circumstances	< 10%
2. Slight	Is unlikely to, but could occur at some time	10 – 25%
3. Feasible	Fairly likely to occur at same time	25 – 50%
4. Likely	Likely to occur within the next 1-2 years, or occurs occasionally	50 – 75%
5. Very Likely	Regular occurrence (daily / weekly / monthly)	> 75%

### 3 Background and Full details of the Report

Through Cllr Buller, the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee raised four questions with regards to the audit report. These are addressed as follows through commentary in 3.1 to 3.4.

3.1 The audit report identified four Priority 1 actions, which we have been unable to complete, but have progressed as follows:

- **Audit Action 1.2: There was no database in place to record and manage the Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) at the point of testing.**

At the time of initial audit, the expectation was to utilise the asbestos management database (TEAMS), but this proved impracticable for a number of operational reasons,

leading to lost time and with the introduction of the new Asset Management Database (Open Assets), the decision was taken to defer until this became operational – see para 3.3 for timescale

- **Audit Action 1.4: The Council does not hold an overview of when all Extra Care Schemes, Domestic and Corporate Properties and Retail and Commercial Property Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) were last completed.**

The overview is provided by spreadsheets which have been developed to provide a comprehensive and complete interim register to log when surveys were carried out for corporate and domestic portfolios, and when next event (new Fire Risk Assessment or Review) are due, but we recognise that Open Assets will be more robust.

With regard to the commercially leased portfolio. There is no requirement for the council to carry out Fire Risk Assessments of these premises as the responsibility lies with the landlord.

- **Audit Action 1.5: There is no schedule in place to ensure that Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) are delivered within the required timescale.**

As above, this has been addressed through use of interim spreadsheet register, and will be a key feature of the new Asset Management Database going forward and will, in addition to scheduling, provide clear and demonstrable monitoring.

- **Audit Action 1.8: Repairs identified in FRAs are not carried out within a reasonable timeframe**

It is neither practicable nor cost efficient to carry out all remedial works within the timeframe set within the Fire Risk Assessment. The Fire Risk Assessment generates a prioritised action plan, where high risk items such as faulty smoke alarms or contamination of communal areas are addressed immediately, items such as creation of bin stores are mitigated against until such time as works can be carried out, and fire doors would form part of the council's capital works programme.

3.2 The audit report identified three Priority 2 actions, one not started and two incomplete, but which we have progressed as follows:

- **Audit Action 1.1: Fire Safety Policy and Procedure Plan does not include some key controls that could prevent a fire.**

These have been addressed in the latest version of the council's Fire Safety Policy and Procedures document, which has been forwarded to H&S Committee for review and approval. Details have also been published on the council's website

- **Audit Action 1.3: Lack of annual reconciliation between council systems to identify outstanding FRA**

This has been addressed through data cleansing of our different housing systems and consolidated within spreadsheet ahead of implementation of Open Assets

- **Audit Action 1.6: No quality checks of FRAs completed by Asset Surveyors**

We will invite Mr Edward Mullen of Lawton Fire, who has carried out the Fire Risk Assessment of Deane House, and provided assessor training to key council staff through the Fire Service College, to act as a 'Critical Friend' and with a remit to sample check Fire Risk Assessments for completeness, quality and accuracy.

- 3.3 Guidance states that Fire Risk Assessments are valid for three years, or until there is a significant change in use or design of premises, however they should be regularly reviewed on not less than an annual basis. We have developed a programme for reviews throughout 2019/20, which will ensure compliance with these guidelines, these start in August 2019.

However, as part of our review of the *Building a Safer Future* report, we are seeking to recruit two additional staff who will be designated as Building Safety Managers, and who would be responsible for inspection of flat blocks, enforcement of any tenancy agreements, as well as taking ownership of actions and repairs. The Building Safety Managers will offer training, support and guidance to tenants so as they can truly benefit from participating in building safety, as well as ensuring they can raise any concerns.

- 3.4 The premises where the Fire Risk Assessment was out of date was the Auction House on the old market site. This was a shared site between the charitable organisation, RAFT, and also the location of the council's Print Room facility. Since April the site controlled by the council has been vacant, an FRA will be completed as required when decision is taken over its future use. The area controlled by RAFT is subject to their own FRA.
- 3.5 Based on the current project programme, the implementation of Open Assets has been deferred until mid-October, to allow the vital and necessary data cleansing work to take place. Phase 2, which will include the servicing module which would support FRAs, will be available by the end of November 2019.

#### **4 Finance / Resource Implications**

The provision of two Case Manager (F-Grade) posts to cover the role identified in the Building a Safer Future report, namely that of Building Safety Manager.

The committee should also be aware that there is still no clear guidance on the use of composite fire doors, which we have fitted to all of our tenanted flats, and a number of leaseholder premises. Once regulations are clarified, there may be a further cost exposure here.

#### **5 Legal Implications (if any)**

Those as set out in the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005

#### **6 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)**

Providing safe homes for all our residents

