



<b>Meeting</b>	Service Leadership Team	Agenda Item	<b>4g</b>
	Performance & Resources		<b>12</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>	9 March 2021		
<b>Report Author:</b>	AM J. Palmer		
<b>Presented By:</b>	Moira Bruin, Director of Operations		
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Business Case – Protection Surge Funding</b>		
<b>Type of Report:</b>	Decision		

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that all options in this paper are approved as the preferred option, to build capacity and resilience into the organisation. It increases our capacity in terms of audit numbers and our ability to enforce. Furthermore, it builds an element of succession planning into the service.

## BACKGROUND

Following the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, Central Government recognised the potential to provide additional support to Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) for resourcing, to ensure that they were able to effectively identify and manage the risks associated with High Rise buildings in their areas.

This support was multi-faceted and resulted in a range of interventions and proposed legislation changes with the support and guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council.

The most recent initiative launched by Central Government is the release of £20m of funds to support FRSs. £4m of this will go to the National Fire Chiefs Council, the rest is to be distributed to Fire and Rescue Services. The amount to be received by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is £317,604.19. This funding is designed to ensure FRSs have the technical expertise required to fulfil this function and ensure fire protection officers have the skills they need. This funding is from 2 grants:

- (i) £10 million Fire Protection Board funding from MHCLG focussed on ensuring fire safety in high-rise residential buildings over 18m and,
- (ii) £10 million Protection Uplift funding from the Home Office to bolster work targeting other higher risk buildings

The scale of the challenge facing ECFRS is 182 properties identified in the Building Risk Review (BRR) process as detailed by the National Fire Chiefs Council. In scope are high rise residential buildings (HRRB) over 18m in height. The minimum for a BRR return is confirmation that each building in scope has had a triage from ECFRS and the minimum data set has been returned to the board.

The triage process will be carried out initially via a review of the current data and comparisons with ECFRS Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP). The triage process will follow the provided NFCC guidance placing each identified premises into one of the following three determinations:

**1. A recent audit/inspection has been carried out**

In this case, the recent audit/inspection can be used to inform the BRR response and complete the minimum question set.

**2. No prior audit/inspection of the building has been carried out recently and the HRRB is determined to be high risk**

In this case the building will be referred for an audit/inspection by a Fire Safety Regulator (FSR) which will inform the Building Risk Review return once complete.

**3. No recent prior audit/inspection of the building has been carried out, however, the HRRB is determined to be low risk and is placed into FRS RBIP if appropriate**

In this case no further audit/inspection is required as part of the BRR and the response and minimum question set should be returned based on the information collected for the triage.

Once triage has been completed Inspections will be programmed as a priority for those premises where they are a HRRB considered High Risk, where no recent audit/inspection has been conducted. Areas with high levels of buildings in these categories will be assisted by local teams from other areas being drafted in to assist where necessary.

The additional funding from the Home Office to bolster work targeting other higher risk buildings will require ECFRS to upskill staff and build capacity and expertise into the department. This will future proof the organisation and ensure we are able to provide the resilience to respond to a changing landscape and meet the increasing demand of the public and the business communities.

## **OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS**

To achieve this, ECFRS plans to use the available funding as follows with immediate effect:

- 1) Upskilling of a cadre of operational Watch Managers in the Level 3 certificate. Our current provider runs courses for 16 people at a cost of £1810 per person. This recommendation is to run a total of 5 courses to be made available to wholetime and on-call colleagues at a total cost in year 1 of £144,800. Training courses to commence in Q1 21/22 and to have concluded before the end of the financial year.

- 2) Upskilling 6 inspecting officers from Level 4 certificate to the Level 4 diploma which will ensure they are trained and qualified to inspect high risk buildings total cost for all 6 is £3,000. This training is ongoing and will be delivered throughout the rest of this year and into the next financial year.
- 3) Upskilling 4 inspecting Officers from Level 4 Diploma to Level 5 Diploma to enable them to be classified as Fire Engineering Design Technicians under the Fire Safety Regulators Competency Framework. It is anticipated that these Technicians will complement the Existing Engineering Team assessing premises within the scope of their competence. Total Cost £12,800 The training plan for this will be developed prior to Q1 and delivered during the next financial year.
- 4) External Wall systems training for 30 officers. This will provide the team with the required skills and knowledge to effectively identify the risks associated with Clad buildings. Total cost for 30 people is £8,500. This training is scheduled to take place in March 2021.
- 5) Provide funding for the Essex Chamber of Commerce to enable them to work with our teams to provide proactive Fire Safety and compliance advice. This will increase our reach into the business community and improve the understanding of how to comply with The Order which will in turn lead to safer buildings and improved business liaison. Total Cost of £10,000 has been identified which will be allocated before end March.
- 6) Recruit a Fixed Term admin post for one year to provide administrative support to the Building Risk Review programme. Total Cost £24,000. This recruitment has taken place and the successful candidate has started their employment with us.
- 7) Recruit a fixed term inspecting officers who will have the sole role of auditing and inspecting premises identified in the Building Risk Review, a previous attempt to recruit four qualified Officers proved unsuccessful, this is due to a nationwide shortage of competent qualified officers to perform the role. One officer has been recruited to assist in delivery of the role, due to having recently retired from the Service they are restricted by abatement conditions and so will be limited to providing 0.4FTE. Total Cost £ 13,800. The recruitment process for this post has concluded and the successful candidate has commenced employment with us.
- 8) The Building Risk Review work will create additional enforcement activity. It is proposed the £40,000 of this surge funding is allocated to support increased enforcement because of the increased activity. We have enforcement activity that has already commenced, and this funding will be used to continue that work.
- 9) Our current officer managers do not have an assessor qualification. In order that we can enhance the service we provide to the public and make certain our quality assurance process is robust and increases our effectiveness it is proposed to train all our office managers in the role of an assessor. This will also ensure that we have a suitable and sufficient process to sign off and approve competency of new staff. There are a total of 6 office managers at a cost of C£4,200. The training plan for this will be developed by the end of March 2021 with training due to commence in Q1 21/22.

<b>Grant Allocation</b>	<b>Building Risk Review</b>	<b>Protection Uplift</b>
Initial allocation	£104,889.87	£212,714.32
Spend area 1		£144,800
Spend area 2		£3,000
Spend area 3		£12,800
Spend area 4	£8,500	
Spend area 5		£10,000
Spend area 6	£24,000	
Spend area 7	£13,800	
Spend area 8	£40,000	
Spend area 9		£4,200
Total allocated	£86,300	£174,800
<b>Total Remaining</b>	<b>£18,589.87</b>	<b>£37,914.32</b>

## **BENEFITS AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

There are clear benefits to enhancing the organisational capability and capacity in terms of Fire Protection. This will help to ensure the safety of the residents of Essex and reduce the risk posed by the built environment. The more defined benefits for each of the options are set out below:

Option 1: This will enable the service to increase its audit capacity on simple buildings. This ensures that the more highly trained specialists' staff can devote more time to those premises that present the greater risk, and by nature are more complex. There are further benefits to this in that this will enable greater succession planning into the central function because we will already have staff that have the initial training. It will also enable operational staff to have a greater understanding of fire safety measures which will enhance their operational decision making.

Option 2: This will ensure we have a greater number of inspecting officers who can audit high and very high-risk premises. It will also enable greater capacity within our enforcement team as this is the qualification required to take formal enforcement action.

Option 3: This will increase capacity and knowledge within the team. It will enable succession planning of our engineering and enforcement function.

Option 4: This is a key training to enable all our inspecting officers to have a greater understanding of cladding on buildings. This will ensure we can better identify and more swiftly provide remediation advice to the responsible person in relation to clad buildings.

Option 5: This funding will enable us to be able increase our reach to businesses and forge greater links with key people in relation to building safety in Essex. It will also enable us to work much more collaboratively with the Chamber of Commerce.

Option 6: This admin post will be dedicated to the building risk review. They will enable us to report on activity and provide the assurance to the senior team and the National Fire Chiefs Council on progress. Having a dedicated role to perform the administrative functions will remove work from the inspecting officers delivering the audits which in turn increases their audit capacity.

Option 7: Recruiting a specialist officer to perform this role increases capacity which in turn means our existing officers can target their activity on premises identified in the Risk Based Inspection Programme. Which means we can deliver our business as usual.

Option 8: Allocating funding specifically for enforcement means that we can use all the powers available to us under The Order it will also increase the amount of time we can use our service Barrister for enforcement and advice ensuring that we can swiftly and robustly take enforcement action where required.

Option 9: Upskilling our office managers in this way means their ability to quality assure work is enhanced. This will improve consistency within the department and ensure we are providing an improved service to the public we serve.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The total financial implications for the proposals are £261,100. This is offset by Government funding of £317,604.19 leaving a nett surplus of £56,504.19.

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

All activities will be undertaken in such a manner to comply with ECFRS policies and procedures to ensure best practice in terms of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

## **WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT**

Protection staff have been engaged in the proposals. Representative bodies have been informed of the approach planned.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Failure to comply with the central government approach leaves the service open to civil prosecution in the event that, as the enforcing agency under the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety order we failed in our duty to robustly enforce that order.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

Failure to implement suitable and sufficient controls on high-risk buildings leaves the public of Essex at risk in the event of a fire in premises.