

From: Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services
David Cockburn, Corporate Director, Business Strategy & Support

To: Policy & Resources Committee – 20th June 2013

Subject: Use of Sprinklers in new and existing buildings

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All Divisions

Summary:

This report provides general information on sprinkler systems, including current practices and legislative requirements. The report makes recommendations as to the Council's future approach regarding the use of sprinklers within its existing estate and any new buildings.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the following:

1 When the Council is constructing new buildings (non schools), consideration as part of the construction specification is given to the use of sprinklers as part of an overall fire management strategy to comply with guidelines and legislative requirements. Where the assessment indicates that it is appropriate, Sprinklers will be included.

2 When the Council is constructing new school buildings, consideration as part of the construction specification is given to the installation of sprinkler systems and assessed in accordance with Department for Education's Building Bulletin 100 and other legislative requirements. Where this assessment indicates it is appropriate, sprinklers will be included. This policy can only be applied to schools for which the County Council is responsible.

3 In relation to the existing estate, the Council continues with its fire safety inspection regime.

4 As a result of a new policy from Kent Fire Brigade, a risk assessment is undertaken in relation to buildings which are located in isolated areas whereby the alarm cannot be easily raised. It should be noted, however, that this is primarily to address property protection rather than life safety issues.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The subject and general scope of this report is to clarify the position of sprinklers in the Council's buildings. The report considers separately the schools and non schools estate.

2 Background

- 2.1 KCC currently considers the overall fire strategy when undertaking major capital projects. This includes an assessment as to the appropriateness of sprinklers having taken into account best practice guidance and legislative requirements.
- 2.2 A fire sprinkler system is an active fire protection measure, consisting of a water supply system, providing adequate pressure and flowrate to a water distribution piping system, onto which fire sprinklers are connected.
- 2.3 It is acknowledged that the use of sprinklers in ceilings is a good way of preventing fire spread and assisting building evacuation, but is neither the only solution nor always the most appropriate management method. In the most recent major school fire in Kent in 2007, the fire started and spread throughout the roof space, and the existence of (downward) water sprinklers in the ceilings would not have prevented the spread of the fire.
- 2.4 The nature of the activity to be accommodated in the proposed development will affect the choice of fire prevention measures. For example, in some cases water is not the best means of tackling fire such as areas with lots of electrical equipment and wiring, like school IT suites, which would become more dangerous if flooded with water.
- 2.5 KCC currently includes sprinkler systems where appropriate in new buildings. The benefit of sprinklers in major refurbishment projects is considered on a case by case basis. It should also be borne in mind that the existing building stock held by the Council may not have sprinkler systems but will have a fire management strategy in place that would have complied with the relevant legislation at the time that the building was constructed and been signed off by building control.
- 2.6 Sprinkler systems installed in buildings can reduce the risk to life and significantly reduce the degree of damage caused by fire. Sprinkler protection can also sometimes be used as a compensatory feature and can be tailored to suit varying environments and balanced towards life and property protection. There are no mandatory requirements from an insurance point of view although there are some cost benefits through reduced premiums.

3. Schools

- 3.1 Building Bulletin 100 (DfE publication) gives guidance to the use of sprinklers within school buildings, and whilst there is a strong preference for the installation of sprinklers in new school buildings, it acknowledges that there are exceptions where it does not represent value for money.
- 3.2 To help clients, local authorities and design teams assess the level of risk and make the right decisions; the DfE has developed two new practical aids. The first is an interactive fire risk assessment tool. DfE expects that this risk analysis will always be carried out and new schools being planned that score medium or high risk using the risk analysis tool will have sprinklers fitted. The second tool is a cost benefit analysis tool. This tool helps users decide whether sprinklers represent good value for money.
- 3.3 Fire suppression systems can cover the whole school, as in the case of sprinklers, or be provided to a specific area using systems such as gaseous or water mist systems which will target identified hazards.
- 3.4 Although the expectation is clear, the measure is not compulsory.
- 3.5 Ensuring employee safety should always be top priority. Businesses should provide proper measures for fire protection, fire prevention, fire fighting and evacuation systems in an emergency. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, businesses must safeguard the health, safety and welfare of all its employees, especially in the case of fire where steps must be taken to help protect workers from hazardous conditions.
- 3.6 Any policy in relation to schools could only be applicable for those schools which are the responsibility of the County Council.
- 3.7 The Kent Fire Brigade have recently adopted new policy whereby they no longer automatically respond to a fire alarm and will only respond when a fire has been confirmed. This means that, particularly for schools in rural locations, there will be a delay in the response by the fire services outside of the school day, where the alarm cannot be easily raised. In these cases, sprinkler installations may prevent the spread of fire, however this would be targeted at property protection rather than life safety.

4. Other Buildings

- 4.1 In other Corporate and County Council buildings constructed, the requirement for the installation of sprinklers is not mandatory for all

buildings under Part B of the Building Regulations 2007, although it does make reference to installation in residential flats and buildings over a certain height.

- 4.2 For life safety, new residential blocks over 30m high must be fitted with sprinklers to meet Approved Document B standards. Similarly, an uncomparted area in a shop or self storage building over 2000 square metres now requires sprinkler protection. There are corresponding regulations applying to large single storey buildings for industrial or storage use, where the largest permitted unsprinklered compartment is 20,000 square metres.
- 4.3 When sprinklers are installed, there may be significant benefits in respect of compliance with Approved Document B of the Building Regulations 2000 (as amended). For example, the installation of sprinklers can allow buildings to be built closer together (half the spacing is required) to adjoining premises. This is a major benefit where site space is limited. Other requirements in Approved Document B regarding travel distances for escape may also be able to be extended and certain requirements in respect of access for the fire service may be relaxed. There may also be the possibility for savings in construction and building cost by relaxation of certain passive fire protection measures and the freedom to allow 'open plan' design in three-storey dwellings and apartments.
- 4.4 Although there is no legislative requirement in England, Part B does make reference to installation of sprinklers in care homes and demands a fire detection and alarm system to 'L1' standard – (whole of the building covered by automatic detectors apart from minor exceptions).
- 4.5 The Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005 applies to virtually all buildings, places and structures other than individual private dwellings and requires that the workplace reaches the required standard and employees are provided with adequate fire safety training.
- 4.6 The Order places the emphasis on risk reduction and fire prevention. Under the Order, people responsible for commercial buildings i.e. the employer, owner, or any other person who has control of any part of the premises, are required to carry out a mandatory detailed fire risk assessment identifying the risks and hazards in the premises. The risk assessment must be recorded if there are a total of five or more employees.
- 4.7 The responsible person must carry out a fire risk assessment which must focus on the safety (in case of fire) of all relevant persons. The assessment should pay particular attention to those at special risk, such as disabled people (including mobility or sensory impairment, and learning disability), those who are known to have special needs, and children; it must also include consideration of dangerous substances liable to be on the premises.

- 4.8 The guidance issued to interpret the Building Regulations now recognises the use of sprinklers for life safety and it is clear that future legislation will call for the increased use of sprinklers. For existing buildings, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which replaced most existing fire legislation in England and Wales requires employers and others (the Responsible Person in the Order) to consider whether the duties imposed by the Order could be better discharged by fitting fixed fire suppression systems. The guidance documents published in support of the legislation recognize this. For example, residential care homes fitted with sprinkler protection can adopt a policy of delayed evacuation in the event of a fire alarm and the usual requirements to fit self-closers to all bedroom doors may be relaxed.

5 What role, if any, is it appropriate for the planning process to play in this?

- 5.1 Fire prevention measures are not matters for control under the Planning Acts, but rather are under the control of Part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations. KCC has no direct role in applying or assessing Building Regulations compliance, which is a separate control regime and the responsibility of District Councils. KCC can only put a policy in place for its Schools and Buildings. Increasingly, as schools turn into academies they will be dealt with by districts through the planning process.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, KCC Property and their external development partners are fully aware of the need to comply with Fire and Building Regulations in the design and alteration of all KCC buildings, and routinely include such duties in their commissions and contracts for works to KCC buildings. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to duplicate these requirements within planning consents, and in particular Planning Authorities are required by Government to avoid imposing duplicate requirements where they are properly covered by other consent regimes. Moreover, many building works are increasingly becoming eligible for construction without recourse to planning consent, so reliance on the planning process would by no means address the perceived need.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The installation of sprinkler systems does add an additional capital cost as well as ongoing maintenance liabilities. However, where these are assessed as necessary as part of the overall fire strategy for the building and to comply with legislation, the costs of sprinklers should be budgeted for and an appropriate maintenance regime put in place.

- 6.2 Budget costs for an installed system can be calculated on average as £25m² for new build and £40m² for retrofit. For example, Cornwallis (14000m²) cost for sprinkler system is £350K, to retrofit this school now would be in the region of £560K. Repton Manor shows a variation on these figures (1FE and Nursery 2021m²) costs were £76K equivalent to £38m² due to separate buildings and a small footprint
- 6.3 Maintenance costs can be difficult to quantify dependant on size and type of system together with reliability and potential damage issues. Annual costs expected to be below £2k per annum however this will inevitably increase with time.
- 6.4 For a school with sprinklers the premium to insure the building will be reduced. The excess may also be waived.
- 6.5 There are no capital funds available to retrofit sprinklers across the estate (schools and non schools). However it should be noted that the existing portfolio will have other fire protection measures which would be compliant with the legislative requirements at the time of construction along with a fire management plan. In addition, the Council undertakes regular fire safety inspections. It is, however, recommended that further assessment is undertaken in relation to buildings which are in isolated locations where an alarm cannot be raised quickly in light of the new policy due to be implemented by Kent Fire Brigade.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 How fire prevention and safety measures are best addressed in building design is a matter for careful consideration and assessment on a case by case basis, in liaison with the appropriate professionals including architects, surveyors, fire engineers and fire officers. However, the use of sprinklers can be effective where appropriate for life safety and property protection.

8. Recommendation(s):

8.1 Therefore it is recommended that the following clarification and any comments made by the Committee be noted:

8.1.1 When the Council is constructing new buildings (non schools), consideration as part of the construction specification is given to the use of sprinklers as part of an overall fire management strategy to comply with guidelines and legislative requirements. Where the assessment indicates that it is appropriate Sprinklers will be included.

8.1.2 When the Council is constructing new school buildings, consideration as part of the construction specification is given to the installation of sprinkler

systems and assessed in accordance with Department for Education's Building Bulletin 100 and other legislative requirements. Where this assessment indicates it is appropriate, Sprinklers will be included. This policy can only be applied to schools for which the County Council is responsible.

8.1.3 In relation to the existing estate the Council continues with its fire safety inspection regime.

8.1.4 As a result of a new policy from Kent Fire Bridge a risk assessment is undertaken in relation to buildings which are located in isolated areas whereby the alarm cannot be easily raised. It should be noted however that this is primarily to address property protection rather than life safety issues.

10. Background Documents

10.1 **BB 100 – Department of Education Website
Document B Building Regulations
Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**

11. Contact details

**Rebecca Spore, Director of Property & Infrastructure Support
Tel: 01622 221151 – Rebecca.Spore@kent.gov.uk**

**Stephen Mercer, Statutory Services Manager (Electrical)
Tel: 01622 696322 – Stephen.Mercer@kent.gov.uk**