



CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE - 17TH NOVEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: FIRE SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The following report is provided to Committee to advise the outcome of the recently completed fire risk assessment programme in schools in line with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Fire can have a devastating impact on a school, not just the short term effects of loss of facilities and equipment which can be quantified, but the longer term effect of loss of coursework, disruption of classes and lowering of morale, the impact of which is much harder to assess. The requirement to undertake a risk assessment of fire safety within a building considers the risk to life as detailed in Approved Document B to the Building Regulations and supporting technical guidance. Property protection, however, is an implicit consequence of the measures to protect life and in this regard the Fire Risk Assessment of each school building addresses the risk to staff and pupils and mitigation of property damage in order to reduce losses and support Education Continuity.
- 2.2 A rolling programme of Fire Risk Assessment has been undertaken in schools since 2006, following the introduction of the duty by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Comprehensive Schools are reviewed annually, larger primary schools every two years and smaller primary schools every three years. The assessment of fire risk and the mitigation required to promote life can be complex and must be undertaken by a suitably competent person. In 2006, Education appointed two officers on a job share basis, one to support the fire risk assessment process and the second to provide training to Headteachers, Site Managers and Caretakers who are duty holders under the Order. Both officers were ex. South Wales Fire Service Officers and had extensive experience in fire safety and building regulations through their careers with the Service.
- 2.3 The following report provides an overview of the outcome of a recent programme of Fire Risk Assessment reviews and highlights where improvements are required. Health and Safety work closely with schools on improving fire safety and with technical divisions where alterations to buildings are planned. This has proved very successful and year on year improvements to fire safety in schools have been made.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The report advises on the Council's statutory duties under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 General Findings of the Fire Risk Assessment Programme in Schools

There has been significant improvement in Fire Safety in Caerphilly Schools since 2006 when the fire risk assessment programme commenced. Education and Risk Management have jointly invested in improvements which include upgrading of fire alarms, improvements to alarm wiring, removal of redundant hose reels and install fire barriers where required, this work has greatly improved the risk to life from fire in schools.

The following statistics highlight the low risk common issues which have been identified during the last round of the fire risk assessment programme and the numbers of schools where the issues exist, all issues are regarded as presenting a low fire safety risk, however as they have been identified in a school environment, the Headteacher has been advised that remedial action is required and will be monitored by Health and Safety:-

- 4.1.1 **Fire safety training records** were not up to date in 30 primary schools and 11 secondary schools and relates to general fire safety training for staff and appointed fire wardens. H&S will be targeting these schools in the New Year for attendance at fire safety training sessions.
- 4.1.2 **Final exit doors** having inappropriate or faulty fastenings, there can sometimes be a conflict between security and fire safety. However, during hours of operation, final exit fire doors must be freely available. This was an issue for 13 primary schools and 4 secondary schools.
- 4.1.3 **Fire signage** not being sufficient to advise of the emergency exit routes from the building. Particularly important for community focused schools which are regularly used outside of school hours. This was identified as an issue in 46 primary schools and 8 secondary schools.
- 4.1.4 **Fire resisting doors**, not being appropriately maintained, this mainly involved damaged smoke/heat seals which are required in the event of a fire to prevent spread of smoke and fire to aid escape and reduce loss/damage. This was identified as an issue in 9 primary schools and 8 secondary schools.
- 4.1.5 **Fire exits** obstructed can be a common problem in schools and is normally down to poor housekeeping, an emergency route must be unobstructed and clear at all times. This was an issue in 14 primary schools and 2 secondary schools.
- 4.1.6 **Damaged ceiling tiles** has historically been a problem in schools where tiles are missing due to leaks, accidental damage etc. ceiling are required to be in tact to prevent fire spread into roof and ceiling voids, which can promote fire spread and compromise safe escape from the building. In 2 Secondary schools, missing ceiling tiles were identified as likely to promote fire spread.
- 4.1.7 **Inappropriate Use of Rooms** relates to electrical switch rooms and boiler rooms which should be free from combustible materials due to the risk of fire, but can become a storage facility if not monitored. This issue affected 7 primary schools and 1 secondary school. This is an issue which H&S also monitors through general inspections, which are undertaken on schools every 2 years.
- 4.1.8 **Firefighting equipment** not sited correctly, discharged and not refilled, or insufficient numbers. The council has a contract in place for servicing fire fighting equipment, the fire risk assessment provides number and type of equipment required and where they should be sited, this is a general maintenance issue for 23 primary schools and 5 secondary schools.
- 4.1.9 **Electrical extension leads** being routinely used and overloaded was an issue in 7 primary schools. As schools are being re-tested for electrical safety, insufficient number of power points should be highlighted for remedial action.
- 4.1.10 **Emergency Lighting** was identified as not being sufficient to cover the school's use in the

hours of darkness in 11 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.

4.2 Remedial Action Required in Fire Alarm Systems in Schools

The following issues with school Fire Alarm Systems have been identified through fire risk assessment. Some of which are recurring findings through previous risk assessments.

- 4.2.1 Cwm Glas Infants** – Two final exits require call points and one detector required to ensure coverage, identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.
- 4.2.2 Cwm Aber Junior** – Four smoke detectors within rooms required to compensate for a dead end condition which was identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014 following recent building alterations to this area of the building.
- 4.2.3 Cwmcarn Primary** – One final exit call point required, identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.
- 4.2.4 Gilfach Fargoed Primary** – Fire detection required to cover for inner room situations also two final exits require call points, picked up in last two Fire Risk Assessment Reviews 2011 and 2014.
- 4.2.5 Panside Primary** – Six final exit call points required, this was identified in a Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2008, the action was signed off as completed on RAMIS in 2013, however, it was found to be only partially completed in the assessment undertaken in 2014, RAMIS changed to reflect this finding.
- 4.2.6 Plasfelin Primary** – Three to four detectors required to cover for inner room situation, this has been identified in a previous Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2009 and was still outstanding in the assessment in 2014.
- 4.2.7 Rhydri Primary** – One detector wrongly sited, needs to be moved to adjacent room to cover for inner room situation. Identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2012 and again in 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.
- 4.2.8 Tyn Y Wern Primary** – One final exit call point required, upgrade to category L4 detection required to cater for use of circulation areas, this was identified in the Fire Risk Assessment review in 2012, still outstanding on RAMIS.
- 4.2.9 Waunfawr Primary** – Call point required in new Boiler Room, identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.
- 4.2.10 Ynysddu Primary** – One final exit requires a call point, upgrade to category L4 detection to cater for use of circulation areas, identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.
- 4.2.11 Y G Cwm Gwyddon** – Three final exits require call points, picked up in previous assessments signed as complete on RAMIS in 2007 picked up as outstanding during Fire Risk Assessment Review 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.
- 4.2.12 Y G Gilfach Fargoed** – Four final exits require call points, one is a new door three are existing, identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.
- 4.2.13 Y G Trelyn** – Four detectors in main block circulation areas to upgrade to category L4 detection to cater for use of circulation areas identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.
- 4.2.14 Ysgol Y Lawnt** – One final exit requires a call point, identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.
- 4.2.15 Hendre Infants** – Call points on two final exits from nursery not connected to the new fire

alarm system, picked up by Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.

4.2.16 Trinant Primary – Two final exits require call points, newly installed exits, identified in last two Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2012 and 2014.

4.2.17 Twyn Primary – Two new final exits in infants block have no call points picked up in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2014.

4.2.18 Newbridge Comp – New office has final exit without call point, identified in Fire Risk Assessment Review 2013, still outstanding on RAMIS.

4.2.19 Lewis Girls Comp – Detection required to cover for dead end conditions on the ground floor rooms in blocks A, B, C & D, identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review 2013 and in previous assessments dating back to 2006.

4.2.20 Oakdale Comp – Two call points missing on new final exits identified by Fire Risk Assessment Review in 2012. Repeater panel recommended, current indicator panel badly sited initially picked up in original Fire Risk Assessment in 2006. As the school is due to close only the missing call points will need to be addressed.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no Equalities implications for the Council arising from this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial implications for the Council arising from this report unless the building alterations were undertaken by the Council. The issues highlighted will impact on the individual schools maintenance budgets, estimated costs for the works recommended at each school would fall below the £10K capital threshold.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct personnel implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 All consultations have been reflected in the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Health and Safety will communicate the findings of this round of Fire Risk Assessment Reviews to Headteachers and request that they review the findings on the RAMIS system. For those schools named in the report which require improvements to their fire alarm system, a letter will be sent to each Headteacher from the Director of Education requesting that the works are undertaken by a given deadline and confirmation of the same in writing to the H&S Department.

9.2 An update report will be provided to CMT in the New Year.

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