

EXTERNAL CLADDING ON IN-PATIENT BUILDINGS

Following the Grenfell Tower incident and the concerns surrounding cladding that arose as a result, NHS Improvement and the Department of Health made contact with all NHS organisations and instructed them to urgently review and undertake risk assessments of all in-patient buildings where external cladding is used.

This report is presented to update the Board of Directors on the findings of this review.

Background

Whilst little specific information is currently available on the Grenfell Tower incident, we do know that issues with the external cladding system that was used on the building have been raised, and concerns have been expressed around the active and passive fire safety systems in use. Whilst investigations into the fire have so far focused on the cladding, we expect that the role of fire alarms and evacuation procedures will also be closely scrutinised.

We have responded to all requests from NHS Improvement and the Department of Health within the stipulated timescales. The key requirement was for us, in conjunction with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), to undertake assessments of all in-patient buildings that utilise cladding. We have no in-patient buildings with external cladding and therefore we submitted a nil return.

External cladding

Three buildings within the WWL estate have some form of external cladding:

- the Cancer Care Centre at Royal Albert Edward Infirmary;
- the Hanover Building at Leigh Infirmary; and
- the Plant Room of the Phase One Building at Wrightington Hospital.

An initial technical review confirmed that the Cancer Care Centre is of a substantially different design to that of the cladding used in Grenfell Tower. The hard wood cedar cladding is fixed to a non-combustible traditional wall construction without any insulation and all windows are recessed into the blockwork. Following assessment, this building is not of concern.

In terms of the Plant Room at Wrightington Hospital, given that it is located on the roof and the cladding is a composite wall panel system only affixed to that area, this has also been identified as not being of concern. We have however requested a joint inspection of the premises with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service to confirm this.

The Hanover Building on the Leigh Infirmary site does have an external cladding system, although the building is used for outpatient activities only. We have asked GMFRS to undertake a review with us in the same way as for in-patient buildings. The Board will no doubt appreciate that demand for GMFRS to assist with inspection of buildings in the region is currently high and due to the fact that the Hanover Building is not an in-patient facility, inspections in other organisations have been prioritised. We will, however, ensure that the review is undertaken with GMFRS at the earliest opportunity.

From an initial risk perspective, we have reviewed the type of cladding used and compared it with that used in Grenfell Tower. The cladding system used on the Hanover Building exceeds the specification of that used in Grenfell Tower as the WWL cladding incorporates intumescent fire breaks (which expand when heated, thus protecting the material underneath or sealing a gap in the event of fire and reducing the likelihood of fire spreading) at junctions in the cladding, compartment walls and compartment floors, which were absent from the cladding in Grenfell Tower. The coloured Trespa FR cladding used on the Hanover building is also of a fire retardant grade.

Fire alarm systems

The fire alarm system deployed across the WWL estate is an 'L1' type system which is the highest standard for life protection. This is tested weekly by our in-house engineers, in accordance with the relevant guidance. In addition, we also have maintenance contracts with specialist fire alarm companies who undertake annual maintenance, repairs, adjustments and additions.

Summary

The specification of the cladding system used on the Hanover Building is above what is expected in the Building Regulations. The active and passive fire safety systems across the estate are of the highest standard and are maintained in accordance with BS5839 and HTM 05-03.

We are also undertaking a number of complementary actions in light of the Grenfell Tower incident, such as reviewing our fire risk assessments and the provision and uptake of fire evacuation training to ensure that we learn any relevant lessons from the incident.

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