

Public Hall Complex - Fire Safety Provision

A supplementary report to the July 2017 Facilities Managers report.

July 13th 2017

Background

It was previously highlighted by Jim Nicholson, our Ellis Whittam health and safety consultant, that the then current Fire Risk Assessment may not be suitable and sufficient.

Based on this advice we commissioned a new Fire Risk assessment, which was completed in October 2016.

The new risk assessment recommended various improvements to signage, fire extinguisher locations and other minor adjustments which have since been carried out. It also highlighted the need for improvements to the standard of fire doors in the building and the upgrading of our fire alarm system to improve the early detection of any fire.

Fire Doors

A number of the fire doors have a variety of issues such as incorrect glazing, missing intumescent seals, missing smoke seals, poor fit, incorrect door furniture etc. and the risk assessment recommended that they were all improved or replaced to meet the BS standard of FD 30(s) – 30 minutes fire protection.

Fire Alarm

The fire alarm system in the Public Hall is basic and aging and not capable of being upgraded. It is, with one exception, a manual system only having one smoke detector in the under stage workshop. A manual system means that someone has to spot the presence of a fire and then, using one of the break glass call points, activate the alarm bells to alert the other occupants.

The Risk

The main concern highlighted by the Fire risk assessor was the risk of a fire breaking out in a part of the building where it would go unnoticed and take hold and, due to the lack of means of detection and the weakness of containment by the fire doors, it may quickly spread throughout the building, which potentially could be occupied by large numbers of people of differing ability and knowledge of the layout of the building to be able to evacuate in a swift and orderly manner.

The plan

In consultation with the Fire risk assessor it was planned to address the fire door and fire alarm issues alongside of the proposed Public Hall refurbishment, which, at that point, was expected to be completed during the summer of 2017.

The Fire risk assessor also advised that if, for any reason, we did not proceed with the Public Hall refurbishment within that time frame we should look to carry out the improvement work regardless.

The current situation

In the early part of 2017 work on obtaining quotes for the fire door improvements was started, still aiming to complete them as part of the refurbishment scheme.

However, this proved more complex than expected and at the time of writing we are still awaiting the final costing's.

In the meantime it became clear that our efforts to obtain grant funding towards the Public Hall refurbishment were looking increasingly unlikely to come to fruition and alternative means of funding would need to be sought if this project were to go ahead.

As this was now going to delay the refurbishment project, possibly for up to another 12 months, the fire risk assessor was contacted again to ascertain our options and the best way to proceed.

The Fire risk assessor's advice was that two potentially serious risks had been identified (Fire Doors and Fire detection) and that we had a legal and moral obligation to manage and minimise those risks.

He understood that due to time and financial constraints these improvement works may not be able to be completed quickly and in which case we should use our best endeavours to manage the risks with whatever alternative methods would be suitable and sufficient until such time as the full improvements could be made and in place.

His suggestion was the temporary use of Fire Wardens (our existing caretakers) to patrol the building whenever the building was occupied by large numbers of people. He is particularly concerned with events in the main Public Hall and we are seeking clarification on the definition of 'large numbers' as this could also apply if ALL the other Public Hall rooms are let at the same time, even if the hall was not in use.

The way ahead

Given all the above information and advice and the potential seriousness of the situation, the Town Clerk and the Chair of Facilities, Councillor Goldsworthy, authorised the immediate instigation of a Fire Warden system.

The next step, which is already underway, is to obtain quotes for an upgraded fire alarm system to the prescribed standard with a view to installation at the earliest possible time, weeks rather than months.

At this point the system of temporary fire wardens will be reviewed. Their main role is early detection, which by that point will be covered by the new fire alarm system.

In the meantime we will have received and reviewed the quotations for the fire door improvements with the intention of putting a proposal for that element of work to a meeting of full Council, again at the earliest opportunity.

A Misson
Facilities Manager