

Fire Safety Advisory Group

Resident Engagement: Principles for Good Practice

Effective and timely engagement with residents is important, both in practical terms, but also to build trust, reassure people, provide certainty where possible, reinforce messages about appropriate fire safety behaviours -- a joint responsibility -- and alleviate anxiety.

The Fire Safety Advisory Group, having heard from a number of landlords / managing agents and considered their experiences, offers the following recommendations, which have been tested with a tenants' forum.

We consider that the following steps, to be taken by owners/managing agents as soon as practicable once cladding systems are known to correspond to failed Building Research Establishment large-scale tests, could form the basis of future guidance.

Set the Context:

Be proactive in establishing the full context, rather than assuming residents will know the background leading up to engagement, explaining that:

- tests have been undertaken following the fire at Grenfell Tower, London in which the types of external cladding used accelerated the spread of fire;
- owners of tall buildings (18 metres or more in height) were asked to submit samples of cladding to the independent Building Research Establishment. Seven tests were conducted on different types of Aluminium Composite Material cladding and insulation filler to see how they behaved in an extreme fire situation; and
- the type of cladding used on the building/s corresponds with a 'failed' test and you are now taking the steps identified in Government guidance. (You may wish to emphasise that your system had been approved/was deemed compliant at the point of installation.)

Reassurance:

Set out the steps you have taken in the design, build and running of the property.

Particularly, you should state if the following apply or are present:

- smoke / CO alarms are in place and are regularly tested;

- automatic sprinkler systems are fitted in common / private areas (linking to the Welsh Government's document, "A Resident's Guide to Sprinklers" would be helpful and informative)
<http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/151218householders-guide-to-fire-sprinklers-en.pdf><http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/151218householders-guide-to-fire-sprinklers-en.pdf>
- a recent Fire and Rescue Service fire safety inspection has been conducted (with date and detail); and
- the building evacuation procedure/strategy in place;.
- other fire safety features of the building (for example, Automatic Opening Vents, compartmentation etc.); and reference to the
- current regular testing and fire safety monitoring regime.

Measures to improve safety:

Of course, making buildings and their occupiers as safe as can be is a joint endeavour. It is important to take the opportunity to reinforce messages about how residents can play their part in keeping themselves safe through appropriate behaviour. Your Fire and Rescue Service can provide support in identifying 'dos and don'ts'. You may also wish to consider setting out expected behaviours and responsibilities, perhaps building these into tenancy agreements and leaseholder purchase documentation, where applicable.

'Know your building':

Similarly, there is an opportunity to broaden awareness of building-specific details for example: the location of fire escapes, fire doors, fire safety equipment, evacuation procedure, muster points, and key contacts.

N.B. Fire Risk Assessments are required to be carried out on all commercial premises, and also on the communal areas of residential premises. The responsible person for your premises must be able to provide this to a resident should they wish to see it Your Fire and Rescue Service may also strongly recommend a 'Type 4' assessment, i.e. beyond the 'front door,' is carried out.

What you are doing now further to improve resident safety:

State clearly, with timescales, what further steps you are / will be taking including:

- inspection by Fire and Rescue Service, and/or local authority housing departments:

- any Fire and Rescue Service recommendations;
- examination of the building/s by an approved Fire Engineer; and, as appropriate:
- removal of any ACM cladding;
- retro-fitting sprinklers systems;
- deployment of fire wardens / safety patrol; and
- any changes to fire safety policy (for example, evacuation procedures, fire detection testing, making space for FRS vehicular access, and any changes to tenancy agreements).

It is also appropriate, if you haven't already, to reassess *who* lives in the building and any specific modifications which may be necessary for, e.g., elderly people and / or those with limited mobility.

Financial impact on residents

Clearly, for many residents, a key concern will be the financial impact on them of any fire/building safety measures. It is strongly recommended that early and transparent indications should be given, wherever possible, of any remediation costs which may fall to residents.

You should indicate at the outset the remediation costs, the anticipated 'lifespan' of costs and the mechanism for cost recovery, (consider breaking this down into three categories: tenants on an assured or similar tenancy; tenants in the private rented sector; and leaseholders).

Communication medium / media:

Timing: Residents should expect to know of test results as soon as possible after you become aware. Delays in advertising residents may create more uncertainty, leading to avoidable anxiety and diminished trust. If full details are not available, or further tests are required to clarify the position, you should publish a timescale of actions and advise when you expect to receive the final result/s. Prompt reassurance about fire safety measures, on the other hand, will be beneficial.

Medium: Give particular thought to *how* you will communicate. A letter should be the bare minimum. Good practice will include leafleting, face-to-face communication, and possibly 'door knocks'. Also, surgeries with managing agents and the FRS have been effective in answering concerns and giving authoritative and practical reassurance. In any case, you should think about how and when you can give further, verbal reassurance and to check messages have been understood and concerns addressed.

Accessible contact: Residents should be clear about who is their key contact. Establish details on who they can discuss concerns with, when and how. A named

contact/s, available at times to suit residents, through a variety of means ('phones, SMS, internet, personally) should be identified.

Key dates: Make sure residents are aware of timescales and key dates. This includes any surgeries, inspections, but also anticipated timescales for remediation work.

Language: Think carefully about the most appropriate and effective style of communication for your residents. A mix and balance of accessible (non-technical) words and pictures can be helpful and powerful in getting messages across. Pictures for 'dos and don'ts' and 'know your building' might be more readily understood. You should also give thought to translating documents where residents do not have English / Welsh as a first language and to providing information in formats accessible to those with particular needs.

County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) are based in every local authority area around Wales and will be able to provide information about any local support available to translate and / or disseminate materials.

Resources:

Much has happened in the months following the fire at Grenfell Tower and the outcomes and recommendations of the independent review of building safety and fire safety and, separately, the public inquiry, will impact on policy and potentially legislation.

DCLG

You can and should keep up to date through following progress and announcements at DCLG <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/grenfell-tower> and FAQs <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/grenfell-tower-faqs/?lang=en>

Fire & Rescue Services

The Fire and Rescue Service is a vital, expert resource. You can get in touch with them for advice on any fire safety-related concerns. The following document gives safety advice for high rise living, advice is also provided by the three regional Fire & Rescue Services in the links below:-



high rise living
(003).docx

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service – Fire safety advice for residents: High Rise Living - <https://www.southwales-fire.gov.uk/en-GB/your-safety-wellbeing/in-business/high-rise-living/>

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service - Fire Safety in High Rise flats -
<http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk/English/Safety/At-Home/Pages/Fire-Safety-in-High-Rise-Flats.aspx>

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service – Advice for High Rise Living -
<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/keeping-you-safe/at-home/high-rise-living/>

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government building safety programme team can be contacted at: housingresponses@gov.wales. The team may also put you in touch with other owners / managing agents who have been through post-test situations and who can share the resources they have developed or discuss their experiences. If you would like to consider changes to your tenancy agreements, you could contact your representative organisation for advice.