

Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel - Residential Housing Stock Health and Safety Compliance

Wednesday 10th November 2021

Fire Safety – Resident Communications & Engagement

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on the approach to effectively communicate and engage with tenants and leaseholders in council high risk residential buildings (HRRB's) on matters relating to fire safety.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Not Applicable
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u> ?	No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Not Applicable
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name	Naz Parkar, Service Director
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	Not Applicable
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Not Applicable
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr C Scott

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: No

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the approach taken by staff in Homes and Neighbourhoods to effectively communicate and engage with tenants and leaseholders on fire safety to ensure residents feel and are safe in their homes and, are fully aware of their responsibilities as tenants and leaseholders.

2. Background

- 2.1 Kirklees Council Homes & Neighbourhoods (HN) is committed to putting tenants and leaseholders at the heart of what we do. This includes engaging with residents to ensure the council's high risk residential blocks (HRRB's) are a safe place to live. The blocks in scope are as follows: the 4 x high rise blocks; 12 x 6 storey blocks and 19 x retirement living schemes (RLS).

3. Fire Safety Engagement Framework

- 3.1 Our Fire Safety Engagement Framework is an integral part of the HN Fire Safety Management Plan. Both documents are currently being updated. The Framework commits the council to:
- Have a range of methods in place to allow tenants and residents to get involved in a way and at a level that suits them
 - Encourage and develop a wider range of innovative, less formal approaches to encourage more people to play their part in fire safety
 - Have arrangements in place to consult and involve tenants and residents who are not involved in formally recognised groups, and
 - Make a special effort to reach those tenants and residents who do not normally get involved

- 3.2 Our approach to engaging and communicating with residents around fire safety supports the recommendations in the Building Safety Engagement Best Practice Report, released March 2021. This independent report commissioned by Government sets out recommendations for good practice when engaging with residents on fire and building safety issues.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-social-sector-building-safety-engagement-best-practice-group-final-report>.

The four recommendations are underpinned by the following principles:

- Building trust with residents
 - Providing a clear explanation of why access is needed
 - Using effective communication methods
 - Delivering the service well
 - Understanding and mitigating any factors impacting on the resident
 - Using a personalised approach
- 3.3 The approach to delivering the Fire Safety Engagement Framework is also aligned with the objectives set out in the HN 'Get Involved' Tenant Involvement Strategy, which states that we will:
- Listen to what our tenants are telling us
 - Put in place the right support for our tenants so they feel empowered to engage effectively
 - Ensure all tenants have a strong voice and can influence key decisions
 - Make sure engagement is planned, monitored and measurable with clear outcomes
 - Use a wide and flexible range of involvement tools and opportunities to promote fairness and inclusion, recognising that one size does not fit all
 - Create opportunities for projects to be delivered that utilise the strengths of our tenants and enable individuals to do more for themselves and each other
 - Give clear feedback on how we have acted upon what tenants tell us and what difference their contribution has made

And will complement key principles that are being developed to inform HN's journey towards service excellence i.e., 'the experience of the tenant come first' and 'contact with tenants is always an opportunity for feedback'.

- 3.4 This year, a Fire Safety Resident Engagement Team were recruited in HN to deliver the Engagement Framework. As part of the Partnerships Service, this dedicated resource works closely with compliance and neighbourhood teams to engage with tenants and leaseholders and, take a central role in the development, co-ordination, and delivery of fire safety communications to residents living in high-risk residential buildings. To date, the priority for the team is on the high-rise blocks.

4. Types of Communication

4.1 The following sections focus on the different types of communication and methods of engagement that are currently in place. These approaches are constantly evolving and developing, in line with the preferences and varying needs of tenants and leaseholders, good practice and to meet the specific outcomes of each project or programme e.g., fire door replacements etc, and each building in scope.

5. Written Communication

5.1 Letters

- In general, the first communication to residents to inform, update or raise awareness will be through a letter, posted or hand delivered to each address. Letters include FAQs where applicable, contact details should residents have further questions and instructions of how the information can be translated into different languages or formats if required. Since the recruitment of the Fire Safety Engagement Team in the spring and reduced restrictions as a result of the pandemic, letters are followed up either through a telephone conversation or a home visit by officers. Ward Councillors also receive copies of key letters sent to their constituents.
- In response to the presence of flammable materials on the high-rise buildings a year ago and, approval of immediate and long-term solutions to address the issues, communications are ongoing focused on reassurance e.g., telling residents about the waking watch arrangements and, to inform residents of the types of work that are or will be carried out, why it is needed, any likely disruptions and options to minimise the impact on households, timescales for delivery and aftercare support.

5.2 Newsletters

- The high-rise blocks at Berry Brow, Buxton House and Harold Wilson Court receive a bi-monthly newsletter. Developed in consultation with the Tenant Advisory & Grants Panel, the newsletter is an opportunity for the council to share key fire safety messages, update on compliance works to blocks and raise concerns relating to tenant behaviour such as false smoke detection alarm activations or combustible waste in communal areas. West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (WYFRS) also contribute to the newsletters e.g., Bonfire Night. The newsletters are also an opportunity to promote other more general opportunities residents may be interested in such as employment support. A sample newsletter is attached at Appendix 1 – example of newsletter
- The 6-storey blocks also now receive block specific newsletters. This is currently on a 6-monthly basis, but the frequency can be increased if there are identified concerns within a block.
- A newsletter for the 19 retirement living schemes is currently being developed on the same basis as the 6-storey newsletters. The first issue is due to be published before Christmas. It is understood that tenants living in the schemes may have additional concerns relating to fire safety, therefore staff from the Fire Safety Engagement Team and Independent Living Officers will be delivering drop-in sessions for tenants linked to the distribution of the newsletters.
- As the newsletters to the high-rise blocks are now established, the Fire Safety Resident Engagement Team are now evaluating the impact of the publications which will include residents.

5.3 Surveys

- Surveys continue to support wider engagement and consultation e.g., future of the high-rise blocks carried out in the spring this year. Where possible, activities are aligned with the council's Place Standard Toolkit e.g., 'Listening to Berry Brow' engagement carried out pre-Covid, the findings helped to inform the regeneration options for the two blocks, Bishops Court and Holme Park Court.
- More recently, surveys have been used to support our work with leaseholders living in high-risk buildings to help to educate them about the importance of compliance and building safety in their homes.

5.4 Noticeboards and Signage

- A full audit of all high rise and 6-storey blocks has been carried of the current information displayed. An order has been placed to provide new noticeboards for all blocks which will be used to display important fire safety/building information.
- Going forward the Fire Safety Resident Engagement Team will carry out regular checks of all information to ensure it remains current and up to date. Updates to fire action notices and evacuation points is currently being progressed.

6. Social Media

6.1 Website

- The KNH website (that will shortly be updated to reflect we are now Homes & Neighbourhoods) provides a variety of information on 'fire safety in your home and in your building' . This includes an 'easy read' summary of the current Fire Risk Assessment for all the high rise, 6 storey blocks and retirement living schemes along with an opportunity to feedback any comments or concerns. Moving forward tenants and leaseholders will also be able to complete surveys online so we can obtain feedback on how effective we are in conveying safety messages.

6.2 Facebook, Twitter, Texts etc.

- We are currently exploring how fire safety messages can be best shared, along with the opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to feedback etc.

7. Face to Face

7.1 Fire Safety Champions

- At the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 26th October, a verbal update was provided on the Fire Safety Champions. As a reminder Fire Safety Champions are tenants or leaseholders who represent the block of flats or scheme where they live. Champions share information relating to fire safety with other tenants and leaseholders; help to advise tenants and leaseholders of their responsibility for fire safety; feedback any concerns in the block relating to fire safety; and take part in block inspections with Housing Officers to monitor communal areas ensuring they are well kept and safe. Fire Safety Champions will also be encouraged to work with other local tenant and resident associations on campaigning or community activities.
- The role of the Fire Safety Champion was developed over the summer with the support of the Tenant Advisory and Grants Panel (TGAP). Our ambition is to recruit one champion for each building in scope, namely the 4 x high rise: 12 x 6 storey blocks and 19 x retirement living schemes (RLS).
- 3 Fire Safety Champions have been recruited to date and are supported by the Fire Safety Resident Engagement Team to ensure that they can effectively carry out their duties.

7.2 Campaigns

- Campaigns are an important way of communicating messages with partner agencies including WYFRS. Work will start after Christmas to plan for our first major campaign during Fire Prevention Month (March 22). This campaign will focus on our key programme of works. [Fire Prevention Week \(FPW\) \(nfpa.org\)](https://www.nfpa.org/).

7.3 Walkabouts

- The Fire Safety Engagement Team are now regularly on-site working alongside Housing Officers, contractors etc. The team provide a visible presence to residents, delivering newsletters or other correspondences, checking noticeboards, engaging in conversations around fire safety with tenants etc.

8. Videos

- 8.1 A suite of short films are being developed in an animated format that will share key messages with residents on the six areas of compliance which are fire, gas, electrical, water, asbestos, and lift operations (LOLER). The films are being designed to inform residents of what the council is doing to keep them safe and what they need to do as residents to ensure the safety of themselves, their family, and neighbours.
- 8.2 The first film is Gas Safety and focuses on the annual gas safety check. It describes what the engineer does at a check and the importance of tenants granting access, keeping to the appointment. It is envisaged that these videos will be shared with tenants at sign up and will be referenced in general comms and as part of inspection regimes. It is anticipated that all six videos will be completed by end of February. A sample video will be shared with the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel at the meeting in December.

9. Implications for the Council

- **Working with People**
It is critical that we work with tenants and leaseholders to improve awareness of fire safety in their homes.
- **Working with Partners**
Collaboration and working together with partners e.g., West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service is key to ensuring tenants, leaseholders and visitors remain safe.
- **Place Based Working**
Recruiting fire safety champions brings together people, places, and partners e.g., West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (WYFRS) working collaboratively to keep residents safe in their homes.
- **Climate Change and Air Quality**
Not applicable
- **Improving Outcomes for Children**
Not applicable
- **Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)**
Not applicable

Do you need an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) **No**

10. Consultees and their opinions

- 10.1 The Tenant Advisory & Grants Panel (TAGP) receive regular updates on the resident engagement elements of the Fire Safety Management Plan.

11. Next Steps and Timeline

- 11.1 Work will continue to develop and amend the communications approach. The main focus for the Fire Safety Resident Engagement Team will be to evaluate effectiveness of communications and the recruitment of fire safety champions in high rise and 6 storey blocks (followed by Retirement Living Schemes in 2020). Both will involve face to face engagement with residents through door knocking and pop-up events

12. Officer Recommendations

12.1 The Ad Hoc Panel is asked to note the update provided in this report.

13. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's Recommendations

13.1 The Portfolio Holder supports the arrangements in place to ensure the voice of tenants and leaseholders is at the forefront of all activities helping residents to feel safe and be safe in their homes.

14. Contact Officer

14.1 Michelle Anderson-Dore, Head of Partnerships, Homes and Neighbourhoods (michelle.anderson-dore@kirklees.gov.uk) 01484 221000

15. Background Papers and History of Decisions

15.1 None

16. Service Director responsible

16.1 Naz Parkar, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods.