

Information following the Grenfell Tower fire

27/06/17

Background information

Grenfell Tower in Kensington, north west London, is a 24 storey housing block that was built in the 1970s and contains 120 flats. It underwent a £10m refurbishment project last year. The fire started in the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017. It is still too early to know the cause of the fire or why it spread so quickly throughout the block, claiming so many lives. The London Fire Brigade along with other agencies will be undertaking formal investigations and the findings of these will be shared with us and other landlords of similar properties. There will also be inquests into the deaths of Grenfell victims and the government has confirmed there'll be a public inquiry.

What we are doing:

1. We have a dedicated central fire safety team to respond to immediate concerns and queries in relation to high rise properties as a response to the Grenfell incident. This is working within our existing health and safety team.
 2. Although we have recently complete Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) to all relevant buildings, we are undertaking an immediate audit in our high rise properties (ten storeys and above). This will include all fire safety and housekeeping arrangements.
 3. We are carrying out a further technical building-specific review of the fire risk assessments for all our high rise properties that have cladding.
 4. We have previously and will continue to work closely with the fire authorities to make sure our properties are safe and meet the required standards. We will follow any new findings or recommendations following the Grenfell fire investigation, where they apply.
 5. We are issuing practical fire safety advice to residents and information will be available on our website to respond to immediate concerns and queries.
 6. We will be offering battery operated smoke detectors to any residents living in a high rise property where there is no smoke alarm fitted, for them to install in their flat.
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Frequently Asked Questions

Does Lambeth have high rise properties?

Yes we do. Lambeth has 122 medium/high rise blocks (six storeys and above), of which 31 have some form of cladding.

What are we doing regarding fire safety following Grenfell?

As part of a wider investigation by the government, we are carrying out further investigations on all our fully and partially clad blocks. This is to review the exact composition and installation, and to ensure its safety. Officers have also visited all our high rise blocks (we have 36 blocks of 10 storeys and above), to inspect communal areas and hand deliver letters (x2) along with London Fire Brigade (LFB) advice.

What do the inspections involve?

Council officers carried out physical inspections the day after the Grenfell fire. The fire safety and housekeeping arrangements in each block are being checked and reviewed. These inspections started on the 15 June 2017 and the findings are being collated and any concerns addressed as a priority over the coming days and weeks. We are also taking samples of all cladding on medium/high rise blocks to send to central government's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for testing. This is an ongoing process but should be completed by the end of this week.

Do we know if we have any cladding the same as Grenfell's?

We do not have any cladding on any of our medium/high rise residential blocks of the same form and construction as that reported to have been used at Grenfell Tower. All of our recent work to bring homes up to the Lambeth Housing Standard (last five years) has installed 'Rockwool' cladding that is fundamentally different to that assumed to have been installed at Grenfell.

Rockwool have issued the following information following Grenfell:

"In the event of a fire, our fire proof insulation slows the spread of the flames. ROCKWOOL stone wool does not produce dangerous toxic smoke and also helps protect the building's load-bearing structure, protecting lives and investment. By protecting the structural frame of the building from destruction by fire, it is possible to give occupants more time to escape, and to limit the damage to the building. We can assure you that the system installed on the property bears no resemblance to that installed on Grenfell Towers, and meets all current fire and safety legislation."

It is reported that Lambeth has a block that has failed fire safety testing?

With regards to the reports of one building in Lambeth having cladding that has failed fire safety testing, the building in question is one built, owned and managed by [Network Homes](#), a housing association, rather than a Lambeth Council housing block.

The London Fire Brigade carried out a full fire safety inspection of the building on Saturday 24 June and has confirmed that because of its multiple up to date fire safety features (including sprinklers) the building does not need to be vacated.

While this block is not a Lambeth Council property, we are of course working closely with Network Homes to ensure everything is in place to ensure resident safety.

How will the council work with Housing Associations and TMOs to ensure the safety of their tower blocks?

Housing Associations, as landlords in their own right, are under the same obligations as us in terms of the DCLG investigation, so they will also be sampling cladding and reviewing procedures. We have asked that we are provided with the same information that they are providing to the DCLG and that we are given copies of all their communications with residents.

In regards to Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs), as the landlord, the council is responsible for major works in TMO-managed housing and we have been carrying out inspections of building materials and methods as with our own properties. We will expect TMOs to review their fire safety procedures alongside guidance from LFB, and we will assist them where necessary.

Are all the council's Fire Risk Assessments up to date?

Yes, all our Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) are up-to-date. There is an ongoing body of work that have come out of the FRAs which is being progressed (as is normal).

Are our fire safety inspections sufficiently detailed? (Grenfell had apparently passed a recent inspection)

They are all in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which passes responsibility to landlords for FRAs. The enforcement authority is the London Fire Brigade.

What is the risk of multiple fatality fires in high rise buildings?

It is rare in the UK for there to be fires resulting in multiple fatalities. There are many years of established fire safety and building construction standards which have improved safety and lowered the risk of fire resulting in fatalities. It is too early to say what contributed to the tragic events at Grenfell. The London Fire Brigade Commissioner Dany Cotton herself said the fire was 'unprecedented, and nothing she had seen in her 29 year service'.

Have evacuation arrangements changed?

No. The evacuation plan for individual blocks has not changed following the fire in Grenfell Tower. Advice from the London Fire Brigade is that people who live in high rise properties/purpose built flats or maisonettes, aside from having a smoke alarm and taking fire safety precautions, should make sure they know the escape route and what to do if there is a fire inside their home or somewhere else in the building (see below).

What if there is a fire within my flat?

If there is a fire inside your flat or maisonette the advice is to alert all the people in your flat and leave, closing your doors behind you. You should follow the escape plan and if there is lots of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air should be clearer. Always use the stairs rather than the lift and call 999 as soon as you are in a safe place.

What if there is a fire elsewhere in the building?

If there is a fire elsewhere in the building then the structure of the building (walls, floors and doors) are designed to give you a minimum of 30-60 minutes protection, enabling you to remain in your flat whilst the Fire Service extinguish it. If there is a fire elsewhere in your building then you are usually safer to stay in your flat unless the heat or smoke from the fire is affecting you, in which case you can leave via the stairs if safe to do so. If it is not safe to leave and you do remain in your flat, call 999 and tell them which flat you are in.

If at any time you are concerned about your safety, and it is safe to do so, you should evacuate the building to a place of safety.

Why don't I have a fire escape in my building and only one way out?

Many residential tower blocks are constructed with a single staircase. This design for high rise buildings dates back to the 1950s, and it is still an accepted method of construction under current Building Regulation guidance.

The principle, in single staircase blocks, is that each individual flat forms a fire resistant compartment to contain the fire and the communal stair is protected by fire doors to enable it to be used for prolonged periods of time.

In the UK there have been fires in housing blocks over many years, and the principles of containing the fire in a single flat has been proven to be a strategy that is successful in restricting fire spread throughout the building.

What if I don't have a smoke alarm in my flat?

If you currently live in a high rise block and don't have a smoke alarm fitted and are unable to purchase one, please contact us (on 020 7926 6000, Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm, or HMfiresafety@lambeth.gov.uk) and we will be able to provide you with one.

If you do have a smoke alarm, test it is working by pressing the test button. If it is not working, try replacing the batteries before replacing it.

Why is there no communal fire alarm in my block? There was a fire alarm in my block but it was removed, why?

As landlords, we are committed to complying with the advice and guidance provided by the fire authorities in relation to the facilities we have in our buildings. It has been consistent and clear advice from fire authorities that there should NOT be fire alarms fitted in the communal areas of purpose built blocks of flats. Where a block of flats or a residential building operates a 'stay put' policy, having a communal fire alarm system fitted causes confusion and is against the ethos of the 'stay put' procedure.

This is not an issue of cost or cost saving; it is to ensure we comply with the best practice guidance provided to us.

Should this guidance changed by the Government Building Control bodies or the fire services, we will of course follow the advice to ensure we are in line with the best practice guidance in place.

Why are there no fire extinguishers in my block? Why have you taken away the fire extinguishers from my block?

We provide portable fire extinguishers based upon guidance given to national landlords by fire authorities as well as guidance published within relevant fire safety standards. This issue is not one related to costs or cost saving.

The fire extinguisher industry, the fire service, and fire safety guides all provide the same clear message, only those people who have received suitable training should attempt to use portable fire fighting equipment. There is no expectation that residents will engage in fire fighting activities, and it is neither feasible nor practical to provide training to residents.

Untrained persons in a fire situation should remove themselves to a place of safety and call the emergency services.

Any resident can choose to purchase portable fire fighting equipment such as a fire blanket or a multipurpose fire extinguisher for personal use within their home. If you do, we encourage you to carefully read the instructions and guidance provided, never to take risks in a fire situation and evacuate the building as soon as possible.

Why have you never carried out a fire drill at my building?

We work closely with the fire service to ensure our approach to fire safety management is in line with what is current best practice guidance.

This advice is that it is not practical or feasible to undertake fire evacuation drills in purpose built residential blocks. The approach to be adopted is that in conjunction with the fire service residents are provided with information and advice on fire safety and what to do in the event of a fire in their home.

How can I be sure that I'm safe in my flat?

As landlords we have in place a process of block inspections that are carried out by a professional fire risk assessment personnel annually. All of these inspections are up to date. They advise us on any issues to be addressed in the block to maintain the best possible level of fire safety.

We also work closely with the fire service to ensure our approach and advice to residents is in line with what is deemed best practice for residential housing blocks.

However, we would reiterate that if you have a fire in your flat or are in any way threatened by a fire in your block you should immediately leave the building.

Are residents with disabilities disadvantaged when it comes to escape routes in the event of a fire?

This is dependent upon the type of disability. The Housing Management service is reviewing the profile of Vulnerable Residents especially within Medium/High Rise for consideration of additional support that may be required.

How can you still advise people to stay put in a fire?

The advice for residents on what to do in the event of a fire is still based on what is the best practice guidance we have received from the fire service. This advice has not been created by us as the landlord; it is promoted nationally by fire services.

Why haven't you fitted sprinklers in tower blocks?

As landlords we are guided by Building Regulations and advice from London Fire Brigade and government on what facilities are required to be fitted within our blocks. If the general advice is changed, that the safety of residents living in high rise blocks in Lambeth would be improved by retro-fitting sprinklers, then we will fit them.

Do you take fire safety seriously?

The safety of our residents is and has always been of paramount importance to us. The fire at Grenfell Tower has shocked and deeply saddened all of us, as it has the whole country. We equally are seeking clarity and information from official sources as to how such a truly terrible fire could have occurred.

As with other Local Authorities and housing organisations we are using all available lines of communication to seek answers, and we are equally concerned that these answers cannot be provided at this time.

We have long standing working partnerships with the fire service and have always engaged proactively to ensure we are managing fire safety in line with the guidance provided by the professional fire industry and fire services.

Older housing blocks do not always have the same level of fire safety as would newly built properties. This doesn't mean they are unsafe, and in recognition of the specialist nature of

assessing any risks to our residents we have employed professional fire risk consultants to carry out fire risk assessments on all of our properties over 10 floors.

We will ensure compliance with any recommendations that are made by the fire service following their investigation in to the fire at Grenfell Tower.

We fully recognise the devastating effect a fire can have and working to achieve a safe environment for residents is a priority for us. We would encourage all residents to assist in keeping themselves and their blocks safe by following all fire safety advice being provided and reporting any issues within your building.

How do fire regulations in new buildings differ from older refurbished blocks (e.g. are sprinkler systems/smoke alarms mandatory)?

New constructions are required to have sprinkler systems, as per Building and Fire Regulations. Grenfell was an old Building and the installation of sprinklers was not a statutory requirement.

Is there any way to communicate a change in instructions eg from stay to leave (as is mandatory in the U.S.)?

Should there be a change in instructions from the Fire Brigade this will be communicated with residents, by various channels and Means of Escape guidance reviewed and preplaced on blocks, notice boards/other surfaces.

Is the borough's Emergency Plan is up to date and appropriate?

The Emergency plan is reviewed regularly and post any major Incident, with testing on possible incidents. Lessons from Grenfell will inform current updates.

How were procedures strengthened following the Lakanal House inquiry?

Following the Lakenall House Fire in 2009, the coroner made [recommendations](#) calling for an update of 'Part B Building Regulations 2010' relating to Fire Safety, advice to residents in the event of a fire, that Government should encourage landlords to fit sprinklers in high rise blocks and clearer advice as to how Fire Risk Assessments should be carried out, and which areas of a Tower Block they should cover. To date, Government has provided no update to Building Regulations nor a date as to when this will be published.

Fire Safety Reminders

Lambeth's fire safety advice can be found online here:
<https://housingmanagement.lambeth.gov.uk/fire-safety>

The following is an extract on advice from the Fire Brigade if you live in a purpose built flat.

Escape route:

- Have an escape plan, which you practice and ensure all members of your household are aware of this plan.
- The best route is normally the way in and out but have a plan b in case it is blocked.
- Keep communal areas and balconies clear so that they don't block your escape and cause a fire risk.
- Always keep door and window keys where everyone can find them.

If your flat is affected by fire or smoke and your escape route is clear:

- Get everyone out, close the door and leave calmly
- Don't use the lift
- Call 999, give them your address details and let them know which floor the fire is on.

If your escape route is not clear:

- It may be safer to stay in your home until the Fire Brigade arrives.
- Find a safe room, close the door and block any gaps with soft materials to stop the smoke.
- Go to a window and shout "HELP FIRE" and call 999.
- Be ready to explain where you are and the quickest way to reach you.

If there is a fire in another part of the building:

- Your home should give you some protection from fire – walls, floors and doors can hold back flames
- You are usually safer staying in your home, call 999, tell the Fire Brigade where you are and the best way to reach you.
- If you are in the communal parts of the building leave and call 999.
- However if you feel unsure, unsafe, can see flames or smell smoke then leave your flat and exit the building.

And don't forget

Make sure you have a working smoke alarm and test it regularly. If you live in a high rise block and don't have a smoke alarm then we can provide you with one. Please contact us.