



Southwark Council

# Resident Fire Safety Scrutiny Panel 2017 Final Report

10<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Author : Graham Turner  
Fire Safety Consultant

Contents	Page no
Cover	1
Contents	2-3
Introduction	4
<b>Q1 - Managing and Improving Fire Safety</b>	<b>4</b>
Fire Risk Assessments /Process	5
Fire Risk Assessment – Frequency	6
Fire Team- Major Fire Safety Works	6
Stay Put Policy	6-7
Sprinklers	7
External Cladding	7-8
Fire Wardens	8-9
Compliance with Fire Safety Law	9
Buildings and Homes Outside of Direct Council Control	9-10
BB7 Fire Risk Management Audit Report	10
Causes of Fires in Southwark’s Dwellings	10
Panel Responses	10-11
<b>Q2 – Fire Safety Communications and Awareness</b>	<b>11</b>
The Council Website	11-12
Southwark Life Magazine	12
FRA’s – Information Available for Residents	13
Fire Safety Information Packs	13
Fireworks	13
Fire Safety Education in Schools	13-14
Tenancy and Lease Agreements	14-15
Communications with Housing Providers Outside of Direct Council Control	15
Internal and External Council Communications	15-16
Fire Safety Communications Strategy	16
Language	16
Panel Responses	16-19
<b>Q3 – Maintenance of Fire Safety Facilities</b>	<b>19</b>
Maintenance - Internal Council Departments – Proactive	19
FRA’s	19
Maintenance	19
Estates action days	19
Maintenance - Internal Departments - Reactive - Call Handling Centre	20

Call Handling Centre	20
H&S	20
SMART – Fire System	20
<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page no</b>
Fire Reporting	20-21
Fire Safety Codes	2
Kitchen Doors	21
Escalation & Support	21
Out of Hours – OOH	21
Promoting Resident Safety	21-22
Electrical Safety Reports	22
General Outages	22-23
Non Urgent Repairs	23
External Housing Providers	23-24
Council Led Directions to External Providers	24
Panel Responses	24
<b>Q4 – Repairs and Refurbishments</b>	<b>25</b>
Standards of Repairs	25
FRA’s- Monitoring of Repairs	25
Private Sector	25
Panel Responses	25-26
<b>Q5 – Resident Responsibilities</b>	<b>26</b>
Resident Impact on Fire Safety – Lease Clauses	26-27
Face to Face – Visual Checks	27
Other Council Communications	27-28
Private Leaseholders in Council Owned Buildings	28-29
Panel Responses	29
<b>Q6 – What is done for the Vulnerable</b>	<b>30</b>
New Tenancies	30
Information Sharing	30
Hoarding	30-31
Panel Responses	31
Combined List of Panel Recommendations/Improvements	32-33
Staff Interview List	34
List of Appendices/Appendices	35-43
Acknowledgements	44

## INTRODUCTION

---

The Southwark Fire Safety Scrutiny Panel (FSSP) was established in August 2017. Comprising of tenant and resident representatives from a range of property types from within the borough and chaired by an independent fire safety consultant, its purpose was to scrutinise selected aspects of the council's fire safety management and operations to ensure that residents are safeguarded against the risk of injury or death due to a fire incident.

Following a scoping meeting the following key questions/areas of concern were identified:-

**What the panel wanted to know:-**

- 1. What is done to manage and improve fire safety within homes and residential buildings and how are appropriate fire safety measures put in place?**
- 2. What is done to communicate fire safety messages and raise fire safety awareness within homes and residential buildings?**
- 3. What is done to ensure that facilities and provisions that relate to fire safety within homes and residential buildings are maintained and repaired on a priority basis, in accordance with the identified level of risk?**
- 4. How is it ensured that repairs and refurbishments are completed to the required standards?**
- 5. What is done to ensure that residents act responsibly within their homes and buildings so that their and others fire safety is not adversely affected?**
- 6. What is done for vulnerable groups of people?**

The key themes from the above concerns generated additional more detailed questions and enquiries that the council were required to respond to. In addition council departmental representatives were interviewed to clarify responses and gather additional detail. Responses were reviewed by the panel and a number of potential areas for improvement have been identified.

### **1. What is done to manage and improve fire safety within homes and residential buildings and how are appropriate fire safety measures put in place?**

The panel were not completely confident that their homes/buildings are safe from fire and that they knew enough about the fire safety provisions within them, such as how fire compartments provide protection from fire and the method of means of escape. As a result of the Grenfell fire media coverage, those who lived in high rise blocks were particularly concerned.

## **What was looked at:-**

### **Fire Risk Assessments/Process**

Current fire safety legislation The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, places a duty on the responsible person of an organisation, such as a council or other housing provider, to take adequate fire precautions for everyone who may be affected by a fire on its premises.

The responsible person must make a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA). In the case of the council the focus is on prevention and a dedicated team of in-house Fire Safety Surveyors/Assessors who are responsible for producing FRAs, by;;

- auditing and recording all fire safety deficiencies in the fire risk assessment,
- the process involving the systematic evaluation of the factors that determine the hazards from fire,
- the likelihood that there will be a fire and the consequences if one were to occur.

The FRA will cover all of the “common areas” such as lobbies, stairs, corridors and those areas designed as the means of escape. Southwark’s FRA’s also sample dwellings to check secondary means of escape, residential fire alarms and the configuration of the dwellings. Additionally Southwark’s FRA’s also covers the exterior of the building including any cladded material. Private individual balconies are monitored to ensure that the level of combustibles is kept to a minimum.

The FRA’s provide information about the building such as:-

- Emergency routes and exits
- Fire detection and warning systems
- The removal or safe storage of dangerous substances
- An emergency evacuation plan
- The needs of vulnerable people, for example the elderly, young children or those with disabilities
- Providing information to employees and other people on the premises
- Staff fire safety training where necessary

Those items (Tasks) that require attention following a FRA, for example remedial works to fire doors, are assessed for potential risk and given a risk rating. The risk rating identifies how the task should be prioritised when it sent to the relevant council departments for action.

The tasks are monitored, reported as completed and dated on the FRA when done.

To further enhance the identification of fire hazards and in particular those that may affect the compartmentation of the building the fire safety team have also started a process of carrying out destructive surveys to ensure that ducts, risers and vents will not allow smoke to travel from one flat to another in the event of a fire for at least 30-60 minutes.

### **Frequency of FRA's**

The FRA's are periodically assessed/reviewed:-

- Sheltered housing blocks, high rise and hostels are given a **yearly** physical inspection
- For all other properties the next visit is determined by the risk assessor based on the condition of the building and risk attached to it. Generally these buildings are given a **2-3 year physical** review
- In addition to this there is also an **annual desktop** review process for these buildings which will trigger an automatic physical review should certain required criteria not be met. Fires that have occurred and residents enquiries may also trigger a site visit irrespective of the next programmed audit date
- The council has 6042 homes/residential buildings that require a FRA, these include general purpose flats, tenant and resident halls, sheltered housing units, converted street properties, traveller sites and hostels
- All FRAs are currently up to date

(Example FRA document of Lakenal House attached as separate PDF document)

### **Fire Team and Major Fire Safety works**

**The panel were concerned that major fire safety works completed by or on behalf of the council are not always completed to the required standard.**

In addition to undertaking FRA's a recent initiative involves the fire team in the sign off stage of major fire safety works that have been identified as part of the FRA process. Smaller scale and day to day repairs relating to fire safety issues are sampled for inspection by in house surveyors or engineers. The fire team also ensure that fire stopping (e.g. materials/method used to fill gaps in fire compartment walls) that is required, is undertaken by accredited fire stopping companies, who are required to photograph works prior to and on completion as evidence of correct installation. The completed fire stopping is also labeled for tracking purposes. The team is also currently assessing the competency of contractors and sit in on design meetings prior to applications going to planning and building control.

### **The Stay Put Policy**

**The panel were concerned that the stay put policy is not safe and they did not have full confidence in the strategy as a safe means of escape in a fire. Their concern was exacerbated as a result of the**

**images and information that was presented by the media following the Lakanal House and Grenfell fires.**

**Some panel members said that they would still evacuate their building immediately, even if a fire was being contained within other parts/flats within the building, and not directly affecting them.**

- The FRA process ensures that risk from fire in the building is as low as possible so it is safe to support the adopted fire strategy (which may include the stay put policy)
- Guidance to 'Stay Put', other than in the flat that is being affected by fire or smoke, is based on the fire protection provided in the building and the walls and doors of each flat
- Some smoke may enter corridors when the residents leave a flat that is on fire, or where firefighters enter the flat to extinguish the fire. By 'staying put' it reduces the risk of residents entering a smoky corridor unnecessarily and potentially being overcome by smoke. It will also allow firefighters to tackle the fire safely and quickly without being delayed by many residents evacuating down the stairways
- If issues that may affect the compartmentation in a block will not effectively support a stay put policy this will be reacted to and appropriate measures will be taken. If a building is not deemed 'safe' this will be recorded and the council will react to this. The safety of the resident is paramount in the risk assessment process
- Link to LFB stay put information video:-

<http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/staying-in-or-going-out.asp>

### **Sprinklers**

**Since the Grenfell Tower fire sprinkler systems are once again a high profile issue and there has been a lot of public and professional discussion in consideration of the retrofitting of sprinklers within high rise housing blocks. The panel were similarly concerned that sprinklers are not fitted within Southwark's high rise housing blocks and felt that if fitted they could be an effective additional fire safety protection system.**

- A recommendation was made in the coroner's report following the Lakanal House fire in 2009 that the council should consider the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in their high rise blocks. The council have since installed sprinkler systems where they have the most vulnerable residents such as in sheltered housing units and hostels
- Currently there are no sprinkler systems in the councils high rise tower blocks however sprinklers and all other strategic fire safety measures are under review by Southwark Council
- The Grenfell fire public enquiry may make additional recommendations or requirements in relation to sprinkler provision

### **External Cladding**

**Since the Grenfell Tower fire the cladding surrounding buildings is a major concern in relation to potential accelerated fire spread. The panel were concerned that cladding of a similar type to that**

**fitted at Grenfell may be fitted to Southwark's council blocks and wanted assurance in relation to this issue.**

- Most of the cladding systems installed to Southwark's blocks has been carried out via a programme with British Gas to improve the thermal efficiency of homes. This cladding is the External Wall Insulation type (EWI). EWI meets all required standards and is very different to the product used at Grenfell Tower. The insulation is applied to the external wall, fire stopped horizontally and vertically and then render applied over the top. This is a solid insulation to the facade with no air gaps
- The same cladding system as that used at Grenfell Tower is not present anywhere on Southwark council tower blocks. Some aluminium or similar facing materials present on some of the lower level blocks, was tested and found to be safe. These low-rise buildings fully comply with the current building regulations and these checks are carried out purely as a precaution
- Towers like Lakanal House are not clad at all, but the appearance of some buildings can lead to confusion and concern
- The exterior of a building and any cladding is now included as part of Southwark's Fire Risk Assessment process

### **Fire Wardens**

**Where the fire safety of a building cannot be guaranteed, such as where compartmentation is compromised or as is the present case at The Ledbury Estate where there are gaps within the building that can potentially allow for the spread of smoke, fire wardens may be engaged at that building or estate.**

**The panel wanted to know what the duties/responsibilities/levels of knowledge were of the fire wardens on The Ledbury Estate and how they were required to undertake their role in support of the fire safety of the residents.**

In the case of The Ledbury Estate the Fire Wardens located there were required as an immediate measure to prevent the LFB serving a prohibition notice on the four blocks when the problems with compartmentation became apparent. On the first night that they were required the wardens were sourced at very short notice from a variety of sources including some council staff and housing officers. During the following day further enquiries were made to identify sufficient wardens to provide cover on a longer term basis- although at that time it wasn't clear how long the period of cover would be. Via the council contract with Kier the company 1<sup>st</sup> Ace Security were identified to be able to provide the required number of guards (originally 26 guards on a 24/7 rota which later increased to 28 plus a supervisor)

The council did not stipulate that the wardens had to have specific qualifications however they are fully briefed at the beginning of each watch and their responsibilities are to:-

- Maintain a 24/7 presence, patrol the building and to give warning to residents in the early stages of a fire
- Carry out designated checks within the building



- Communicate with each other, the control centre and contact the control centre in the event of a fire (who will then call the fire brigade) and for them to call the brigade too
- Patrol a designated area, utilise communication and loud hailer equipment
- Be easily identifiable by wearing sur-coats that identify them as fire wardens and have identification badges

### **Compliance with Fire Safety Law**

**The panel wanted to know how the council and other housing providers ensure that they comply with the law and who ultimately ensures that fire safety duties are complied with.**

- Like any other “responsible person” the onus is on the council to comply with the duties placed upon it under fire safety legislation. As the enforcing authority for fire safety legislation in London, the London Fire Brigade (LFB) has a duty to inspect and will where necessary undertake inspections of buildings, check fire safety management systems and information such as FRA’s are suitable and sufficient. Failure to comply with the requirements of the legislation can result in recommendations being made for improvement, enforcement action and/or prosecution
- Since the initiation of the dedicated fire team there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of recommendations received by Southwark Council from the London Fire Brigade following their enquiries and inspections. There have been no enforcement notices, prohibition notices or prosecutions
- The fire team manager has developed a very positive relationship with LFB and meets with them regularly to ensure that the council is meeting its statutory duties, with regards to the fire safety processes and activities it undertakes. Information and intelligence is also shared to ensure that both the council and fire brigade responds to fires occurring in homes and buildings within the borough is both current and effective

### **Buildings /Homes that are Outside of Direct Council Control**

#### **Private sector landlords or housing providers**

- In the private sector, housing providers must take adequate fire precautions for everyone who may be affected by a fire on its premises and must also comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. As the Order only applies to the common areas up to and including flat entrance doors, additional legislation, The Housing Act 2004 applies to health and safety within the flats which are classed as domestic premises. This legislation can be used by the council for enforcement of measures that support fire safety within flats such as internal doors, fire alarms or ventilation ducts
- The Council’s Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team is responsible for ensuring homes meet basic standards and for property licensing in Southwark. Advice and information for private landlords or housing providers is provided on the Southwark Council website. In addition, the Council’s licensing schemes ensure that rented homes in Southwark meet the correct standards.

This enables the council to provide the necessary support and information to landlords and tenants

There are two types of privately rented properties in the borough which require a licence

- Houses or flats shared between groups of unrelated people or let as individual rooms, also known as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs); some properties converted to flats are also HMO's and will need a licence
- Properties let to a single family, couple or individual (including studio flats) when they're located in one of the selective licensing areas

The Strategic Director Housing & Modernisation wrote to all of the main housing association providers asking them to provide information on their policies and procedures for fire safety management. Housing associations were also asked to confirm the arrangements for their fire risk assessments and that these were timely and reviewed regularly.

### **BB7 Fire Risk Management Report**

To run in tandem with the development of the FSSP report the specialist fire safety consulting firm BB7 were appointed to undertake a fire risk management audit on behalf of Southwark Council. The audit reviewed the council's processes and procedures around the way it maintains governance over fire risk.

Following the completion of the audit the review report was made available to the panel at the resident fire safety scrutiny panel meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017.

### **Causes of Fires in Southwark's Dwellings**

The panel were keen to know what the causes of fire were within homes in Southwark. (See appendix 1, p35 for causes and total numbers of fires in dwellings LB Southwark for years 2013 -16)

### **What the panel liked:-**

Most of the panels concerns regarding how fire safety is managed within the council were answered by the dedicated fire safety manager. The face to face meetings between the panel and the fire safety manager provided an opportunity for the more technical aspects of the written responses to be explained in detail so that they were fully understood and so provided improved confidence in the fire safety at their homes/buildings.

- That the council seeks to be compliant with fire safety legislation the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and that the fire service monitors compliance
- That there is a dedicated fire safety team that manages fire safety in the borough
- How the FRA process is managed and undertaken so that buildings are maintained safely
- That there is programme for regular review of FRA's and that the FRA's are up to date

- That intrusive surveys are now undertaken to check that compartmentation is maintained and remains effective
- Involvement of the fire team with remedial fire safety works including sign off
- That fire safety information packs are provided to residents in blocks of 7 floor and above and that it is intended that they will be provided for all buildings in the future
- That there is close liaison with the LFB so that current and topical fire safety issues are discussed and addressed

#### **What concerned the panel**

- Although panel members are more confident about the general fire safety of their buildings they are still not wholly convinced that the stay put policy is a safe procedure in purpose built blocks incorporating a single staircase. In spite of the thorough FRA process and the checks that are undertaken to ensure that buildings are safe, some residents are still not confident with this evacuation strategy
- That sprinklers are still not fitted within Southwark's high rise blocks
- That management, training and supervision of fire wardens that are engaged on estates such as The Ledbury Estate may not be sufficient
- Electrical appliance safety within individual homes is of a great concern, as the causes of the fires at Lakenal House and Grenfell Tower started in a TV and fridge freezer respectively

#### **What might be improved**

- Additional fire protective measures such as the installation of sprinklers in Southwark's high rise residential buildings may enhance building safety and improve resident confidence in the stay put evacuation strategy
- Additional engagement with residents to improve trust in the stay put policy
- Better provision of electrical appliance safety information and advice to improve awareness of the fire related risks
- The competency of Fire Wardens – training and certification to be provided to support role requirements

## **2. What is done to communicate fire safety messages and raise fire safety awareness within homes and residential buildings?**

The panel wanted to know how fire safety is communicated and promoted to residents throughout the borough. In view of the identified causes of the fires at both Lakenal House and Grenfell Tower fires (TV and fridge) the panel were particularly concerned about electrical safety within homes.

#### **The Council Website**

Located within the council website there is a range of helpful and informative fire safety information. However, to locate the information users must first click on individual icons such as 'Housing' and click on further icons to access the fire safety information which is not immediately obvious to find. Use of the general search facility can also help locate information. The home screen does not have a direct link to a single dedicated fire safety section or portal where information can be found in one place or accessed by the use of hyperlinks that direct the user to information that may be located within other sections of the website.

Example links to fire safety information on council website:-

- **Housing icon - Safety in the home**  
<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/safety-in-the-home>
- **Housing icon - repairs section - fix it at home videos – testing the smoke alarm**  
<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/repairs/fix-it-at-home-videos>
- **Housing icon - Council tenants services – Tenants handbook- Health and safety –section 8 fire safety** <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants-services>
- **Health and wellbeing icon – Health and safety section - Fire safety - link to fire safety info at LFB**  
<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/business/health-and-safety/fire-safety>
- **Home owners services – Making alterations to your home – internal works – permissions-FS regulations**  
<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/home-owners-services/making-alterations-to-your-home>

The home screen of the website can be an ideal way to provide prominent topical links to information with the utilisation of banners or pop-ups. At the time of writing the report there were no fire safety messages on the home screen of the website although it is understood that there have been in the past. It is also understood that there is limited space for messages on the home screen and that there is competition for use of this space with other council departments.

### **Southwark Life Magazine**

- This is a quarterly magazine that is made available as a hard printed copy which is posted out to residents and via the council website as an on- line version
- The magazine has been utilised for fire safety messages, the summer 2017 edition was a dedicated fire safety special following the Grenfell Tower fire

- Link to Southwark Life Magazine

<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultation-and-news/southwark-life>

### **Fire Risk Assessments – Information Available for Residents**

- The completed fire risk assessments provide detailed fire safety information about a building and are publicly available documents that can be provided on request. Due to high demand there is currently a waiting time of up to 30 days

### **Fire Safety Information Packs**

- These packs provide important fire safety information about the building including fire exit routes, fire doors, fire alarms
- Currently the packs are provided to new tenants of blocks of 7 storeys or greater and are also available on the council website
- The packs are also available online via the council website
- It is intended that the packs will be provided for all residential buildings
- Link to example info pack:-

<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/safety-in-the-home/fire-safety-information-packs>

### **Fireworks**

- On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 poster/letter warning of potential consequences of antisocial behaviour connected with fireworks/ bonfires use was sent to tenant organisations for communication to residents/community members

### **Fire Safety Education in Schools and Colleges**

State schools shape and deliver fire safety education based on a range of information and will be influenced by local and national needs. Therefore, what actually happens will be determined at school level.

### **Primary**

The Primary schools in Southwark will mainly follow the curriculum which stipulates that fire safety is covered in PSHE & Wellbeing curriculum framework from the schools website and includes the content for year 2 pupils that schools have access to and can utilise as part of their provision.

<http://schools.southwark.gov.uk/pshe-healthy-schools/pshe-sex-relationship-education-sre-wellbeing-2>)

- Also, “working scientifically” through chemistry in Science, schools also have access to “Science planning and links to working scientifically” (attached document in appendix):

<http://schools.southwark.gov.uk/assessment-curriculum/curriculum/science-1>

- Through the LA’s membership of CLEAPPS, schools also have access to resources from the website: [www.cleapss.org.uk](http://www.cleapss.org.uk)

- In addition, some schools will also access support from:

[www.london-fire.gov.uk/education-team.asp](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/education-team.asp)

- Some schools participate in TfL’s Junior Citizens Programme which are fast-paced, multiple-agency events run in some Greater London boroughs for Year 6 students (and occasionally Year 5s). Schemes are run either by the Safety and Citizenship team or by other agencies, such as the Metropolitan Police or local borough councils. The London Fire Brigade participate in these programmes

<https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/schools-and-young-people/safety-and-citizenship/primary-pre-transiti#on-this-page-1>

### **Secondary Schools**

- Secondary schools in Southwark are independent and therefore the council does not have control over what is delivered to pupils aged 11-18 years old. A question went out to the 20 secondary schools in Southwark and only 1 response was received which indicated that Fire Safety is touched on in the conversations held during the firework season
- The chair of the SASH group (Southwark Association of Secondary Head teachers) responded and said that fire safety does not appear in the secondary school curriculum but may be touched on in science, assemblies or in form room learning

### **Tenancy and Lease Agreements**

- The standard Southwark tenancy terms and conditions includes clauses detailing the personal fire safety responsibilities within homes and buildings.(See appendix 2, p36)

- It is understood that private owners lease agreements may contain a range of alternative clauses relating to fire safety. These leases may not be as prescriptive as council tenant leases but will include some common clauses in one form or another
- In addition to the leases, new council tenants are provided with 2 leaflets when signing for a new tenancy: an LFB leaflet 'Home Fire safety Guide' and a Southwark leaflet 'Southwark Home Fire Safety Guide'
- If the new tenancy is in a block of more than 6 storeys or of complex design then the new tenant, at the point of signing for the tenancy, is also given a Fire Safety Information Pack for that building
- In addition there is a conversation between new tenants and Resident Services Officers (RSO's) about the general rights and obligations of tenants as set out in the standard Southwark tenancy terms and conditions
- Where necessary tenant rights and obligations and fire safety awareness can be reinforced by the RSO at the 6 week follow up appointments that are arranged for new tenants

### **Communications with Housing Providers Outside of Direct Council Control**

- There are a very large number of housing providers operating in Southwark, including housing associations and private landlords
- There are around 65 housing associations with some stock in the borough. The Council works closely with housing providers, however they are independent bodies scrutinised by their own boards. In terms of regulation, housing providers are regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency, who make sure that housing associations are well managed and financially secure
- In the private sector, the Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team are responsible for ensuring homes meet basic standards and for property licensing in Southwark. Information and advice to assist landlords can be found on the council website

### **Internal and External Council Communications/Meetings**

- Southwark Council (Compliance Operations and Fire Safety Manager) attend meetings that involve all London Councils and these are currently held about every six weeks. The sole aim of these meetings is to discuss fire safety issues common to all Councils. Among those topics discussed recently have been the cladding tests and co-operation between authorities to improve fire safety tendering. London Councils will shortly be sending a representative to Southwark to discuss how we as an authority undertake fire risk assessments
- The Fire Safety Manager also attends (on a six to eight week cycle) a Fire Safety Manager's forum which involves a number of housing associations and Councils that operate in South, South East and North East London. This forum looks at best practice and the most common fire safety issues such as type 4 assessments, the use and storage of mobility scooters, roof voids, amendments/updates to guidance and technical bulletins

- The Fire Safety Team also have excellent links with the London Fire Brigade and they have recently been involved in helping to produce a note for housing providers in how to manage their blocks with cladding and compartmentation issues. The London Fire Brigade attend both the London Councils and Fire Safety Manager forums. Communication between Southwark and all three groups is maintained at all times
- Residents are consulted as part of a major consultation process on the quality Homes major works programme (QHWP) which is a 10 year programme and updated each year. Any changes are reported to the home owners' council and tenants' council. For individual schemes, the council has an extensive consultation exercise known as Putting Residents First (PRF) a 27 point guide on how to consult
- A letter from the Cabinet Member for Housing, "Fire Safety in Tower Blocks" dated 14<sup>th</sup> June was displayed on council noticeboards on estates in June 2017. This was followed up with a further letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June detailing the council's actions in response to the Grenfell tower fire. (See appendix 3, p37 -38 & appendix 4, p39-40)

### **Fire Safety Communication Strategy**

For fire safety messages to be effective for residents they should be delivered with a degree of frequency which ensures that they do not become forgotten over time

- Following the Grenfell Tower fire special communications messages were produced, Southwark Life magazine dedicated to fire safety, website messages including a fire safety frequently asked questions document was produced
- It is understood that the communications team require a request for any promotional information or communications messages to be agreed prior to being published. The fire safety manager is generally responsible for initiating fire safety messages and they must be agreed with the communications team
- There does not appear to be a formal policy or process that the fire safety manager may follow that will assist him with initiating and developing fire safety communication messages for delivery to residents in Southwark
- It does not appear that there is an agreed fire safety communications strategy for the planning and delivery of safety messages to residents in Southwark

### **Language**

- Southwark is multicultural borough with a population of approximately 294,000 people. Over 120 languages are spoken with 11 per cent of households having no members of the household who speak English as a first language. It is council policy, based on government direction that all council communications are in English

### **What the panel liked**



- That there is a range of useful fire safety information available within the Website
- The Southwark Life is a local magazine which can be used as a medium to provide fire safety information to residents
- The information that is provided within the FRA's and that they are available to the public on request
- Tenant fire safety info packs are currently provided to new residents for properties in blocks above 6 stories
- Southwark home fire safety guide and London Fire Brigade Fire Safety leaflets are provided to new tenants and are available online
- The role of Resident Services Officers and the potential to provide fire safety information and advice

### **What concerned the panel**

- That insufficient information and engagement is provided to improve confidence in the stay put policy, some residents were still unsure of what to do if a fire occurs in their building
- That resident fire safety awareness is not sufficiently maintained with the support of regular or programmed communications and engagement
- That the delivery and promotion of fire safety information/messages for residents was to a degree reactionary, uncoordinated and inconsistent
- That there does not appear to be an agreed fire safety communications strategy for the planning and delivery of safety messages to residents in Southwark
- That there does not appear to be a formal policy or process that can assist the fire safety manager with initiating and developing fire safety communication messages for delivery to residents in Southwark
- That the Southwark Council and LFB home fire safety guides /leaflets that are provided for new tenants are poor quality photocopies, appear dull, do not catch the eye and may not encourage tenants to read them. They are also not dated to show how current the information is and/or version number
- That adequate fire safety information is not provided/reinforced at the 2 yearly tenancy checks
- That the Southwark Council and LFB home fire safety guide /leaflets that are provided for new tenants are not re- issued to long term tenants at the 2 yearly tenancy check
- That fire safety information available within the website is not easy to find as it is not all located in one dedicated area
- That the opportunity to deliver additional fire safety messages on a more regular basis is not exploited
- There is competition for space to deliver promotional fire safety messages on platforms such as the council website, magazine or council tax statements. This may limit the opportunity to deliver of fire safety messages

- That not all residents take sufficient personal responsibility to ensure that they understand fire safety advice and information that is provided and made available for their personal and residents safety
- That the role of the RSO could be more effective in the delivery of fire safety information/advice and the gathering of intelligence relating to the fire safety of residents
- That fire safety education appears to stop at senior school age. There appears to be little if any fire safety education in relation to deliberate fire setting and its connection with anti-social behaviour and the effect it may have on the community
- That FRA's may not be accessible to everyone and information detailing how they can be requested is only available via website access/application.
- The FRA's that are made available are only available in English language
- Fire safety awareness information is absent from the paper version pro forma used at the 2 yearly tenancy checks and this may also be the case with the preferred method of recording the tenancy check which is completed using an iPad

### **What might be improved?**

- A more proactive approach in the delivery of communications and the development of a fire safety communications strategy, which encompasses a range of communication methods which can be delivered to residents at planned regular intervals
- Development of a formal policy/process that can assist the fire safety manager in the delivery of fire safety information and advice to residents
- Resident confidence in the stay put policy with additional engagement, provision of information and promotion
- Improvements to the website so that all available fire safety information is located or accessed from one dedicated Fire Safety section/portal. This will assist Southwark employees as well as residents in obtaining current fire safety information
- Provision within the website for online fire safety videos and interactive tutorials that residents can be signposted to when residents take up tenancies, tenancy checks, or promoted within Southwark Life magazine, council tax notifications, rent statements, posters etc
- Exploit current available communications opportunities and seek new ones for the delivery of fire safety advice i.e. using quarterly rent statements, Southwark Life Magazine, website home page banners and pop-ups, RSO tenancy checks, council tax reminders, fridge magnets, etc
- How residents are encouraged to take personal responsibility for ensuring that they maintain their fire safety awareness and understanding of the fire safety provisions that are provided in their homes and buildings to keep them safe
- Utilisation of resident representatives to act as fire safety champions who can promote fire safety messages at local level with the provision of newsletters and information at meetings
- Enhanced guidance and training for RSO's so that fire safety information and guidance opportunities are maximised when tenancy visits and checks occur

- Improve the appearance and quality of fire safety guidance leaflets (council and LFB) that are currently provided to new tenants, and include on them the leaflet version/production date so that currency of the information can be verified
- The Provision and re enforcement of fire safety information at 2 yearly tenancy checks. Re issue paper fire safety guidance leaflets (council and LFB) as original copies that are provided at tenancy sign up may be out of date or lost and information forgotten by residents
- Provide additional fire safety information interventions for older children and students (Secondary school and upwards) such as the effects of deliberate fire setting and impact on community
- The checklist on the RSO pro forma that is used for tenancy checks to be enhanced with additional fire safety enquiries/checks

### **3. What is done to ensure that facilities and provisions that relate to fire safety within homes and residential buildings are maintained and repaired on a priority basis in accordance with the identified level of risk?**

**The panel wanted to know faults within homes and buildings that could affect fire safety were identified, reported and followed up on to the point of resolution.**

#### **Maintenance - Internal Departments – Proactive**

##### **FRA's**

- The fire Risk Assessment is one of the key ways in which fire safety provisions within homes and buildings is maintained. The Fire Safety Team undertakes fire safety audits on the buildings. This audit inspects and recommends works (tasks) for the common areas (stairs, halls, landings, lobbies etc.) and in the process of assessing the building it samples dwellings internally. Any required tasks, such as fire door repairs/replacements are sent to the repairs or major works team for completion having been given a priority rating which should ensure that they are completed with the appropriate time scale
- The council's new APEX data management system/database highlights tasks that are not completed and automated e mails are sent to the responsible team for follow-up. It may be the case that the task has been completed but not signed off on the system in which case the e mail reminds the responsible department to complete the action

##### **Maintenance**

- Major works may include the replacement of fire doors, fire alarm or electrical systems are carried out in order to maintain and improve the housing stock
- Regular planned maintenance/checks such as annual gas safety checks

##### **Estates Action Days**

- Making housing services more accessible to residents is a key priority for the council. The council organises Estates Action Days where housing issues can be resolved just yards from residents' homes
- Residents are given the opportunity to speak to their resident services officer, a member of the safer neighbourhood's team and report any repairs issues on the spot such as communal repairs and repairs needed in their homes

### **Maintenance - Internal Departments – Reactive**

#### **Call Handling/Contact Centre**

Southwark council have a dedicated 24/7 available hour call handling centre available for residents which is located at Peckham where calls relating to issues that may be related to fire safety are dealt with accordingly in the following ways:-

- **Health and Safety Issues**

The contact centre has a positive reporting approach on gas leaks, fires, carbon monoxide leaks and other situations that consider the welfare of the person calling and others, i.e. a single issue that could pose a bigger impact later on.

For example with gas leaks, many local authorities and housing associations have passive approaches. For example if a gas leak is reported by one resident in a block of ten, to a social landlord contact centre, many social landlords advise the caller to contact the National Gas Emergency (0800 111 999) to stop the gas leak. This places the responsibility back onto the caller, and should they fail to place the call, they and neighbours could be at risk of an explosion/fire. In the event somebody was injured, the social landlord could be in breach of health and safety at work Act 1974 i.e. failing to take reasonable steps to prevent an incident.

Therefore on receiving any report of gas or carbon monoxide leaks, the contact centre will advise the resident to report the leak, but will also independently place a call to National Gas Emergency Line to ensure that the issue is logged as an emergency. The reference number will be recorded and emailed to engineering services with the details for follow up work (Engineering oversee gas servicing). Positive reporting is also applied when a resident reports a smell of burning from the communal ventilation system, and also when a smoke alarm sounds in converted houses (Alarms between flats and communal areas can be interlinked in converted houses). This is generally not the case in stand-alone purpose built dwellings. In these instances a call is placed to the fire brigade. All of these processes are signed off by relevant compliance managers.

All staff are required to sign a training sheet to confirm they understand their responsibilities under the gas leak and carbon monoxide leak process/Smoke detector process.

- **SMART: Fire Systems**

Many of the most vulnerable residents are in Sheltered or Hostel Accommodation. These units are staffed and are usually protected by sprinkler systems and are linked to a central fire alarm system. If the alarm is activated a signal will go to the manned 24 hour SMART team based at

the contact centre, who will screen the activation, and call the Fire Brigade immediately if this is needed.

- **Fire Reporting**

The contact centre has a positive reporting process for any new reports of fire. This is irrespective of the size of the fire, or whether it has been made safe. The process requires that an emergency manager must be advised directly by phone, that a reporting email is sent to repairs managers, fire team and residents services officers. This allows the cause of fire to be investigated and helps identify and reduce any further risks i.e. frequent arson on a block, means more frequent inspections and estate cleaning are needed. The report will help to facilitate this.

In the event of a Live Fire the contact centre must ensure 999 have been called and the Emergency Manager has been informed by phone. There is also an email list to cascade the information to relevant council staff quickly.

- **Fire Safety Codes**

Works orders that concern Fire Safety, are given separate codes, so they can be tracked and prioritised on the council repairs system Iworld. The Code is FR5 and applies to fire doors and mains wired alarms. The contractors know to give these priority and these must be attended within 5 to 7 working days.

The contact centre will whenever possible book these within the first 3 working days.

- **Kitchen Doors**

Statistically most fires start in the kitchen in the early hours of the morning. It is policy that no works orders to kitchen doors can be cancelled by the contact centre. Works orders can only be cancelled by contract managers, once they are satisfied that the repair has been undertaken.

- **Escalations and Support**

The contact centre work closely with Southwark's Emergency Manager. They will also escalate to the Local Authority Liaison Officer for complex situations, where co-ordination is needed between different departments.

- **Out of Hours (OOH)**

Out of Hours the Emergency Manager oversees a team of Emergency Housing Officers. They have technical repairs knowledge and are able to attend and survey any situations that are causing concern. This is helpful where a situation is affecting one flat, but may escalate or needed further investigation.

If any issues need to be escalated, the emergency manager and the appointed Local Authority Liaison Officer can be contacted 24 hours a day. Further reassurance and support out of hours, is provided through the Duty Resident Services Manager, who is also contactable out of hours, and is able to attend site quickly to provide support to repairs services. The Resident Services Manager is also able to compile a list of vulnerable residents in a particular block or estate. This is particularly helpful in the winter, i.e. if a block loses heating, it can be ensured that elderly residents are checked on and temporary heaters are provided.

The contact centre OOH team is a resilient and experienced team, and a member of the senior management team are always contactable 24 hours for guidance or to take ownership in emergency situations.

- **Promoting Resident Safety**

All staff must attend a 40 minute training session on smoke alarms, and this includes training and promoting resident safety. Where appropriate staff will always promote the London Fire Brigades free home fire safety checks to residents.

All staff must sign a training sheet to confirm they understand their responsibilities under the fire reporting process and smoke alarm sounding at full alarm process.

The contact centre works closely with maintenance and compliance and ensure that training documents and process have sign off from relevant technical managers.

- **Electrical Safety Reports**

Flats within a high rise block will each have their own external fuse located in the communal area, in a locked intake cupboard.

When a fuse blows, the power to the dwelling it serves will be isolated. This can indicate that unsafe electrics have caused the fuse to melt.

When the external fuse blows, before reinstating electrics for a tenanted property an electrician will be sent to assess if the internal electrics are safe (i.e. no unsafe DIY has been undertaken). For a Leasehold property an Electrical Installation Condition report will be requested, this will be surveyed by the electrical inspector. The external fuse is only reinstated when it is confirmed that it is safe to do so, reducing the likelihood of electrical fires in homes.

- **General Outages**

Many of the council's homes run from district heating where heating and hot water is delivered to all properties by one external boiler house. The council keeps a list of outage reports which is circulated across council teams at agreed times (8am, 10am, 12noon, 2pm, 4pm, and 5pm).

This allows the council to keep track of outages, but also prevents them from raising multiple works orders. Once a repair is raised to the boiler house, engineering will text all residents in affected blocks to update them of the outage. Outages also apply to loss of electrical power and drinking water/secondary water to a block. For incidents where there is no electricity/drinking water/heating to a sheltered housing unit, cross council emails can be sent. These will go to resident services officers, maintenance and compliance, councillors, resilience planning and Local Authority Liaison Teams.

These enable the council to cascade important information quickly and arrange contingency plans i.e. drop bottled water off if a block is without drinking water. The resident services office will also produce a list of vulnerable residents, and arrange for them to receive additional support and checks to help them through the outage. There are cross council emails for standard issues, but also emergencies i.e. responding to a fire/major incident.

Information is additionally made available to residents about planned and unplanned outages that are taking place across the estates in Southwark on the council website.

Table 1: Attendance times illustrations

Incident Type	Code	Attendance time
Water into electrics/unsafe electrics within a dwelling	RM1	2 hours service level agreement : During office hours
	RM0	2 hours service level agreement : Out of Hours
Loss of electrics/Estate lighting in communal area	ES1	4 hours during office hours
	ES0	4 hours - Out of Hours

Table 2: Call handling figures for the Call Centre

<b>Repairs (All figures based on 2016/2017 Financial Year)</b>	
Average waiting time (Overall Repair Services)	00:03:20
Average call answer waiting time OOH	00:01:41
Calls Taken	260,746
Complaints received	128
% of complaints to calls taken	0.05%

- **Non Urgent Repairs**

Individually Residents can also report non-urgent maintenance issues to the council online via by e mail at “my site”

- **External Housing Providers**

In the private sector, it is the landlord or the responsible person’s responsibility to ensure that homes meet the required provisions for fire safety and to maintain those provisions on an ongo-

ing basis in accordance with the relevant legislation such as the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and Housing Act 2004.

(See appendix 5, p41– Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team/Housing Act 2004)

- **Council Led Directions to External Providers**

Recently the Strategic Director Housing & Modernisation wrote to all of the main housing association providers asking them to provide information on their policies and procedures for fire safety management. Housing associations were also asked to confirm the arrangements for their fire risk assessments and that these were timely and reviewed regularly

### **What the panel liked**

- That a call centre is available to receive calls 24/7

### **What concerned the panel**

- Panel members were not happy with the call centre and reported negative personal experiences of the service provided. Being held in a queue for a long periods of time prior to speaking to a call handler in person and poor handling/response to reports of fire related maintenance issues were particular concerns of the panel
- That there is a disparity between the call handling figures provided (time taken to answer calls) and the personal experiences of callers in the time taken to be connected to a call handler in person. Do the figures relate to connection and being placed in the queue times rather than connection to a call handler times?
- That some call handlers did not have sufficient local knowledge of estates or buildings so that informed decisions could be made concerning the wider issues of the reported maintenance problems
- That the OOH officers frequently appear reluctant to attend incidents

### **What might be improved**

- Enhanced training for call handlers so that calls can be handled more effectively
- Reduce the queueing and waiting times so that callers are responded to by a call handler in a reasonably time frame
- Review of the OOH mobilisation and decision making framework to ensure that the necessary attendance is made to incidents that are reported



#### **4. How is it ensured that repairs and refurbishments are completed to the required standards?**

The panel wanted to know how repairs and refurbishments are checked for quality of work prior to being signed off as satisfactory.

##### **FRA's**

##### **Checks/monitoring**

- Part of the new fire risk assessment process as described under question 1 is that the fire team are now involved in the sign off stage following major or other priority works
- The fire team also ensure that fire stopping that is required is undertaken by accredited fire stopping companies who are required to photograph works prior to and on completion as evidence of correct installation. The completed fire stopping is also labelled for tracking purposes. The team are also currently assessing the competency of contractors and sit in on design meetings prior to applications going to planning and building control
- Major works projects are closely scrutinised and are checked by clerk of works/ internal lead designers
- Smaller scale and day to day repairs relating to fire safety issues are sampled for inspection by in house surveyors or engineers
- Where it is found that contractors work does not meet the required specification/standards financial penalties are imposed or can be or money held from account

##### **Private Sector**

- Ultimately the fire authority or council can utilise their legal powers to ensure that landlords maintain fire safety provisions accordingly. Follow up checks on remedial works that have been undertaken as a result of deficiencies notices issued or enforcement action taken by the fire service or council will ensure that the required works have been completed to the required standards
- The Planning and building regulations process will also provide the council with some degree of monitoring and supervision where works are subject to these provisions

##### **What did the panel like**

- That the knowledge and skills of the fire team is now utilised in the sign off stage of significant and/or major fire safety works

### **What concerned the panel**

- That insufficient numbers of checks are undertaken of completed repairs/remedial works to identify unsatisfactory workmanship so that appropriate follow up action is taken within a reasonable time scale
- That major fire safety or related works may not be completed to a satisfactory standard as they are not receiving sufficiently robust checks and technical inspections as they progress
- That those responsible for undertaking progress and sign off checks of major fire safety works may not possess the necessary technical qualifications, competencies and accreditations to undertake the role effectively
- That snagging works take too long to be completed

### **What might be improved**

- Enhanced monitoring, checking and supervision of repair/remedial works
- The numbers of completion/sign off checks to be increased to ensure that required standards are met, resident satisfaction and standards of living maintained
- Ensure that those responsible for the checking progress and signing off major fire safety or related works are able to carry out the tasks effectively by guaranteeing that they have the required professional & technical qualifications, competencies and accreditations to undertake the role
- The time it takes for snagging works to be followed up and completed

## **5. What is done to ensure that residents act responsibly within their homes and buildings so that their and others fire safety is not adversely affected?**

**The panel wanted to know, how individual actions or behavior within homes that may impact on others fire safety within the building, was monitored and controlled**

There are a number of ways that the council is able to communicate awareness and monitor activity within their homes:-

### **Clauses within Leases**

Tenants and private leaseholders -

Within the leases there are clauses which inform the tenant or leaseholder of their responsibilities regarding their home. All leases will have the following clauses in one form or another:-

- that a leaseholder must not make any structural alternations or additions to the property or remove any of the landlords fixtures and fittings without the previous consent of the landlord in writing
- Not to do or permit or suffer to be done any act or thing that may render void or voidable any policy of insurance in respect of the building or any part thereof or cause an increase in premium thereof
- Not to obstruct the common parts of the building or the estate
- To observe all reasonable regulations made by the landlord from time to time controlling the exercise of any easements or rights granted within this lease

(See appendix 2, p36 for standard terms and condition of Southwark tenant leases relating to fire)

### **Face to Face /Visual Checks – at Tenants Homes**

Currently the Councils Resident Services Officers (RSO's) undertake tenancy visits at least once every two years. In 2017-18 the council was in the second year of the current programme. They use a mobile device which includes a tenancy visit script and which highlights those tenancies where a visit has not been completed during the current programme.

The Resident Services Officer (RSO) will undertake the visit recording answers on the device. Occasionally tenancy visits will be undertaken out of programme if the council is made aware of intelligence which warrants further investigation.

The tenancy visits includes a check on the tenancy, a conversation about any support needs or assistance (especially for residents with a vulnerability) that residents may require and the completion of a checklist relating to the property. That checklist requires the RSO to check that the front door is secure, whether there is hoarding, whether the kitchen door is present, whether there are internal fire exits, whether the fire exit is clear, whether any balconies are cluttered, and whether there are any obvious changes to layout such as:-

- To the internal construction or layout – this could include removal and/or addition of internal walls and partitions,
- Windows/doors fixed shut,
- Recessed light fittings,
- Permanently blocked secondary means of escape,
- Use of lofts as sleeping spaces, creation of access (hatch) to loft space, and
- Creation of serving hatches to/from kitchen.
- Changes such as those listed above must be immediately reported to the fire safety team for consideration/action.

(See additional RSO responsibilities and information in appendix 6, p42-43)

### **Other Council Communications**

- A range of information that provides guidance for residents in keeping their homes and others safe from fire can be found within a number of locations on the council website
- In recent months letters have been sent to all tenants setting out their personal responsibility to protect themselves and their neighbours in the event of a fire
- Individual letters are also sent to individual residents when necessary
- In July 2017 a report and information was provided for the Southwark Tenant Council meeting members/representatives(Fire Safety & Fire Risk Matters – Presented by David Eatwell, Minutes from Overview & Scrutiny Committee (19th June 2017), Fire Safety Correspondence / Further information, Ledbury - Assessment of the Ignitability of Cladding report, OSC Report, Letter to Rt Hon Sajid Javid

### **Private Leaseholders in Council Owned Buildings**

- There is not a programme of compliance checks for all private leaseholders. Homeowners are required to take personal responsibility to ensure that they are observing the terms of their lease and complete works in accordance with the appropriate regulations
- There is a targeted programme conducted by Resident Services which is primarily intelligence led, based on information of actual or potential breaches of the covenants of the lease. Sources of intelligence includes neighbours, contractors, pre-assignments visits by Officers of the Council, pest control team, estate cleaners, Noise and Environmental Pollution Team, the Police, Zoopla , Airbnb and Resident Services officers carrying out day to day duties

For the year 2016/17 the council has a target to visit 300 leaseholders and as at the end of December 2016, 270 visits had been carried out

Table 3: Profiled outcome of the 2016/17 leasehold checks

Actions	
No checked	270
Retro Permission	1
Special Investigation	0
Breach notice	18
Rectification notice	2
Multiple Occupancy	15
Authorised improvement	11
Unauthorised improvement	19
LA Repair Obligation	9
Covenant Breach	9
All	84

- There are covenants of the lease which give the council the right of internal inspection and also the covenants of seeking the council's written permission before making any alterations for which they have legal redress for breach of the lease
- Tenants that undertake unauthorised alterations to their homes after the 4 week application period has been exceeded are not exempt from retrospective action by virtue of not having received a decision by the council
- If alterations are carried out without council permission, the leaseholder will be asked to remove them or the council will remove them and charge for undertaking this work
- Separately there are actions that can be taken by regulatory bodies such as Building Control and Planning
- The council are not aware of any other landlord who carries out routine compliance checks on all private leaseholders, this would be an almost impossible task to undertake and would be in breach of the lease and privacy
- In the rented private sector complaints made to the council and or fire service in relation to behaviour that may compromise fire safety such as overcrowding or unauthorised activities within homes can be investigated by the private sector housing team or fire service utilising their regulatory powers

#### **What the panel liked**

- RSO tenancy checks as a means of identifying non-compliance in council tenanted properties
- Clauses relating to fire safety responsibility within council tenancy leases/agreements

#### **What concerned the panel**

- Tenants that do not understand or ignore lease clauses/conditions
- Unauthorised alterations that occur within leaseholders properties that may affect home and building fire safety that remain undetected
- That alterations are being undertaken within homes after the required 4 week application period due to council decision making process having not been completed within the specified period

#### **What might be improved**

- Private Lease agreements – consider improving lease agreements so that clauses relating to homes/ overall building fire safety are enhanced and suitably sufficient to inform owners of the effect and impact that unauthorised alterations may have on fire safety provisions within buildings

- Consider making online training module/s available for residents as a means of improving fire safety knowledge within homes/buildings
- That decisions on applications for alterations are completed by the council within the specified 4 week timescale to prevent the commencement of unauthorised alterations taking place after the cut off time

## **6. What is done for vulnerable groups of people?**

**The panel wanted to know how vulnerable people who circumstances or behavior that may impact on their own or others fire safety within their homes and buildings is managed.**

### **New Tenancies**

For those applying for a new tenancy the initial tenancy assessment will assist in identifying individual housing needs. Where possible the most vulnerable residents may be placed in specialist housing such as sheltered housing units or hostels.

### **Information Sharing**

A multi-agency and inter departmental approach is adopted to assist in identifying those vulnerable groups or individuals most at risk from a range of issues including fire safety.

Information regarding vulnerability which may impact on individual or group fire safety, may be obtained via a range of sources such as:-

- RSO tenancy checks/visits
- Links with social services and other community agencies
- Joint vulnerability tenants list held by housing and Adult Social Care
- Information provided to the call/contact centre – flagging to other council departments or other support services
- Council tenants – may be helped with providing adaptations where they have difficulty getting about their home

### **Hoarding**

Across the UK 2.5 % of the UK suffer from this mental illness which is potentially 1.2 million people. Hoarding is considered as a mental illness (Figs supplied by <http://hoardingdisordersuk.org>)

High levels of clutter make it much easier for a fire to start and create a greater risk of fire spreading, increasing the risk of injury and death.

It can also make it very difficult to escape and can lead to difficulties for firefighters tackling the blaze.

Southwark Council has a special procedure to deal with hoarders and has set a target for 2017/18 to close 40 cases.

Table 4: No of identified hoarding cases within Southwark for previous 3 years

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
145	160 69 closed	144 41 closed

Table 5: Numbers of hoarder cases within Southwark for current 2017/18 year

Cases c/f from last year	144
New cases 2017/18	18
Closed cases 2017/18	21
No. current cases	141

#### What the panel liked

- Vulnerability of residents is part of the RSO tenancy check
- Multi-agency/departmental approach in support of vulnerable persons

#### What concerned the panel

- Tenants/residents remain living with increased fire risk due to personal health issues, may not wish to leave their homes for alternative accommodation when their vulnerability and associated needs have been identified.

### **What might be improved**

- The provision of home fire (domestic) sprinklers for residential fire prevention in the homes of vulnerable residents that do not wish to or may not be suitable for supported living in accommodation such as sheltered units

### **Combined List of Panel Recommendations/Improvements**

#### **Q1- Managing and Improving Fire Safety**

1. Additional fire protective measures such as the installation of sprinklers in Southwark's high rise residential buildings may enhance building safety and improve resident confidence in the stay put evacuation strategy
2. Additional engagement with residents to improve trust in the stay put policy
3. Better provision of electrical appliance safety information and advice to improve awareness of the fire related risks
4. The competency of Fire Wardens – training and certification to be provided to support role requirements

#### **Q2 - Communications and Awareness**

5. A more proactive approach in the delivery of communications and the development of a fire safety communications strategy, which encompasses a range of communications methods which can be delivered to residents at planned regular intervals
6. Development of a formal policy/process that can assist the fire safety manager in the delivery of fire safety information and advice to residents
7. Resident confidence in the stay put policy with additional engagement, provision of information and promotion
8. Improvements to the website so that all available fire safety information is located or accessed from one dedicated Fire Safety section/portal. This will assist Southwark employees as well as residents in obtaining current fire safety information
9. Provision within the website for online fire safety videos and interactive tutorials that residents can be signposted to when residents take up tenancies, tenancy checks, or promoted within Southwark Life magazine, council tax notifications, rent statements, posters etc
10. Exploit current available communications opportunities and seek new ones for the delivery of fire safety advice i.e. using quarterly rent statements, Southwark Life Magazine, website home page banners and pop-ups, RSO tenancy checks, council tax reminders, fridge magnets, etc



11. How residents are encouraged to take personal responsibility for ensuring that they maintain their fire safety awareness and understanding of the fire safety provisions that are provided in their homes and buildings to keep them safe. Fire Safety training for residents promoted and encouraged
12. Utilisation of resident representatives to act as fire safety champions who can promote fire safety messages at local level with the provision of newsletters and information at meetings
13. Enhanced guidance and training for RSO's so that fire safety information and guidance opportunities are maximised when tenancy visits and checks occur
14. Improve the appearance and quality of fire safety guidance leaflets (council and LFB) that are currently provided to new tenants, so that they more likely to be read and include on them the leaflet version/production date so that currency of the information can be verified
15. The Provision and re enforcement of fire safety information at 2 yearly tenancy checks. Re issue paper fire safety guidance leaflets (council and LFB) as original copies that are provided at tenancy sign up may be out of date or lost and information forgotten by residents
16. Provide additional fire safety information interventions for older children and students (Secondary school and upwards) such as the effects of deliberate fire setting and impact on community
17. The checklist on the RSO pro forma that is used for tenancy checks to be enhanced with additional fire safety enquiries/checks

### **Q3– Maintenance of Fire Safety Facilities**

18. Enhanced training for call handlers so that calls can be handled more effectively
19. Reduce the queueing and waiting times so that callers are responded to by a call handler in a reasonable time frame
20. Review of the OOH mobilisation and decision making framework to ensure that the necessary attendance is made to incidents that are reported

### **Q4– Repairs and Refurbishments**

21. Enhanced monitoring, checking and supervision of repair/remedial works
22. The numbers of completion/sign off checks to be increased to ensure that required standards are met, resident satisfaction and standards of living maintained
23. Ensure that those responsible for the checking progress and signing off major fire safety or related works are able to carry out the tasks effectively by guaranteeing that they have the required professional & technical qualifications, competencies and accreditations to undertake the role
24. The time it takes for snagging works to be followed up and completed

### **Q5– Resident Responsibilities**

25. Private Lease agreements – consider improving lease agreements so that clauses relating to homes/ overall building fire safety are enhanced and suitably sufficient to inform owner of the

effect and impact that unauthorised alterations may have on fire safety provisions within buildings

26. Consider making online training module/s available for residents as a means of improving fire safety knowledge within homes/buildings
27. That decisions on applications for alterations are completed by the council within the specified 4 week timescale to prevent the commencement of unauthorised alterations taking place after the cut off time

**Q6– What is done for the Vulnerable**

- The provision of home fire (domestic) sprinklers for residential fire prevention in the homes of vulnerable residents that do not wish to or may not be suitable for supported living in accommodation such as sheltered units

**Staff Interviews**

Name	Role	Topics covered
David Rowson	Fire Safety Manager	How residential FS is managed:- FRA's, stay put policy, sprinklers, cladding,
Louise Neilan	Communications Manager	How council communications are identified and delivered
Paul Langford	Director of Resident Services	Tenancy checks, role of RSOs, performance information
David Markham	Director of Asset Management	Maintenance, repairs, sign off, contractors
Langaole Ncayiyana/Dave Cole	Call Centre Managers	Visit to call center, maintenance and fire related calls
David Eatwell	Are Manager	Role of RSOs
Kieron Carroll	Deputy Fire Safety Manager	FRAs, prioritising tasks
Laura Davies	Senior Fire Safety Coordinator	FRA admin/management and the Apex system

## Appendices

Appendix 1 - p35	Causes and total numbers of fires in dwellings LB Southwark
Appendix 2 - p36-37	Letter 1 “Fire Safety in Southwark Blocks” dated 14/6/2017
Appendix 3 - p38-39	Letter 2 - Council response to Grenfell Tower fire dated 22/6/2017
Appendix 4 - p40	Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team – Housing Act 2004
Appendix 5 - p41	Extract of council tenancy with fire related responsibilities
Appendix 6 - p42-43	Additional RSO’s information

## Appendix 1

### Causes and total numbers of fires in dwellings LB Southwark (Info supplied by London Fire Brigade)

Parent Ign Source	2013	2014	2015	2016
Cooking appliance	135	163	134	118
Smoking related	25	31	39	29
Electricity supply	26	27	24	21
Matches and candles	32	23	16	24
Other domestic style appliance	27	16	23	21
Naked flame	26	16	18	18
Undetermined	15	16	14	15
Heating equipment	8	9	9	4

Electric lighting	6	3	7	6
Industrial equipment	4	2	1	2
Fuel/Chemical		2	1	3
Bombs and explosives	2			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>261</b>

## Appendix 2

### Typical written Southwark tenancy agreement extract with information relating to fire safety:-

A The standard Southwark Tenancy terms and conditions states at:

Para 11a - You must not use the communal areas of the block or estate for anything other than access, rest and quiet recreation (unless otherwise designated).

Para 13 is about fire safety and states: **Fire**

13a) You must not cause or allow fire exits, or routes, from the property or in any communal area, to be blocked or obstructed, or otherwise to act so as to create a health and safety risk.

13b) You must make sure that any fire check doors internal to the dwelling fit securely and are in working order and report any faults to us.

13c) You must not fit any security grilles, metal bars or covers to any doors or windows without our permission.

13d) You must not use barbecues on balconies or in any other part of the property or premises which is unsuitable for their use.

13e) We will undertake our statutory and contractual responsibilities, including fire risk assessments to make sure the health and safety of our tenants is not put at risk.

Para 14a - It is your responsibility to make sure that rubbish and unwanted items are properly disposed of and any rubbish or recycling must be placed in the designated area on the agreed day of collection in line with our instructions.

Para 17f states: You must not cause or allow the storage or use in the property including the communal areas, private balcony, store or a garage, which is an integral part of the property, any liquid petroleum and paraffin (e.g. Calor gas) containers or cylinders, or dangerous chemicals, gases or materials or any other inflammable materials or gases.

Para 22a states: We shall keep in repair the structure and exterior of the property and common parts and communal facilities to block and estate. This will include: drains; gutters and external pipes; service roads; designated play areas; entrances; entrance halls; staircases; roofs, and fire -fighting equipment. Subject to reasonable expenditure and consultation this

may also apply to the following, if they affect your enjoyment of the property, or common parts: lifts; communal TV aerials; entry phones; communal lighting; refuse collection facilities; communal heating, and ventilation services.

### Appendix 3

#### Copy of Letter to Residents (1) Fire Safety in Blocks

All Southwark tenants and leaseholders  
Councillor Stephanie Cryan  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing  
Stephanie.cryan@southwark.gov.uk  
Date: 14 June 2017

Dear resident,

Fire safety in Southwark blocks

As the terrible news has emerged overnight from West London, our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by the fire at Grenfell House. It is particularly raw for us in Southwark, bringing back dreadful memories of the Lakanal fire in 2009 in which 6 people tragically lost their lives. I understand that many residents living in high-rise blocks in Southwark will be concerned, and I wanted to write to you straight away to reassure you that Southwark has carried out a huge programme of works in recent years to improve the safety of our tower blocks.

- Following the fire the council began an ongoing programme to ensure all its properties received a regular full fire risk assessment, beginning with those deemed to be high risk.
- Since 2009 the council has spent £62 million on its fire risk assessment programme and associated fire safety works for all its council housing in the borough
- We continue to invest as necessary as part of the ongoing major works programme.
- The council works closely with London Fire Brigade (LFB) and meets regularly with them, both on an operational and fire safety level, informing them of progress on the risk profile of the borough and other issues.
- LFB assists the council in advising residents on fire safety and fitting smoke alarms inside their homes.
- In February 2015, all fire risk works to all high rise and lower/more complex housing were

complete.

- Since then the council has completed a programme to fit state of the art smoke detection systems to the dwellings in these blocks, and has a rolling programme underway to introduce a similar system in all remaining blocks

As a council, we are doing all that we can to keep our residents safe from the devastating consequences of a major fire, but you can help too by following this advice:

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm in your home
- Keep balconies free from clutter
- Please don't leave rubbish or bikes in communal areas or obstruct escape routes
- Make sure you know where your nearest fire exit is
- If you are a smoker please do not smoke in common areas of the block
- Always fully extinguish cigarettes smoked in your home and dispose of them carefully and safely

We have been in contact with Kensington and Chelsea council to offer any help and assistance we can at this difficult time.

Thank you and best wishes,  
Stephanie  
Councillor Stephanie Cryan  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing

#### Appendix 4

##### Letter to Residents (2) Response Following Grenfell Fire

Dear resident,

Following on from my letter of 14 June 2017, I am writing to update you on the actions that the council has taken in response to the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower.

I attended a meeting of the council's overview and scrutiny committee (a cross party group of councillors) together with senior council officers on Monday 19 June, to discuss fire safety in the borough and answer questions from councillors raising questions and concerns on behalf of residents. Following that meeting, I have ordered a full review of the council's fire safety strategy, and asked officers to look again at whether we need a new approach to fitting sprinkler systems and other fire safety measures, in light of the Grenfell tragedy.

Council officers met with the borough commander of the London Fire Brigade on 20 June 2017. The LFB pledged to support the council as it conducts its review of fire safety strategy. The LFB and the council also agreed to jointly host a series of meetings for chairs of tenants and residents associations to be held at fire stations throughout the borough. We will publicise the dates of these meetings and locations as soon as possible. In the meantime, the LFB is continuing to carry out their routine community assurance meetings at individual high rise buildings throughout the borough.

The government has asked all council landlords, housing associations and private owners of high rise tower blocks to check all of their tower blocks for combustible cladding and to have it tested for fire safety where this exists. I want to reassure you that none of the 174 tower blocks in Southwark have combustible cladding. We have also asked for assurances regarding the newly built, privately owned high rise blocks in Southwark, although new high rise residential blocks are subject to strict regulation – materials in any buildings over 18m need to be fire retardant with sprinklers installed at over 30m. We have checked all of our council owned blocks, whether they are high rise or not, and we have identified some cladding that we want to investigate further on four of our lower blocks. We have written to residents living in these lower blocks to let them know that their block has some aluminium

or similar facing and we are arranging urgent checks to see whether any further action should be taken. We hope to have the results of the testing back within 2 weeks, but in the meantime we have reassured these residents that their building fully complies with the current building regulations and that these checks are being carried out purely as a precaution.

Some residents have asked us when their last fire drill was and where the fire assembly point is. All of our tower blocks have emergency information clearly labelled in all of the main communal areas, and we are rolling out new signage in lower blocks which includes a reminder not to smoke in communal areas. The LFB advises residents to adopt the stay put strategy, so the council does not undertake fire drills, except in our sheltered housing schemes and hostels. Evacuation is the decision of the emergency services.

We have also been asked about fire extinguishers and dry risers and how we can be sure that they are in working order. We do not have fire extinguishers in common areas as we cannot, and would not, expect residents to fight fires. Dry risers are inspected and tested every six months and records are kept by the Engineering Services team.

The council has a professional fire safety team made up of 15 officers including former firefighters that works very closely with the LFB to ensure that fire risk assessments are up to date and that fire safety awareness information is readily available and reinforced regularly. Clearly the Grenfell Tower fire means that we need to urgently need to increase fire safety awareness as residents will understandably be very anxious. We are working with the LFB to agree information that can be sent to all of our council residents.

Kind regards,  
Stephanie  
Councillor Stephanie Cryan  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing



## Appendix 5

### Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team – Housing Act 2004

In the private sector, the Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement team are responsible for ensuring homes meet basic standards and for [property licensing](#) in Southwark. Information and advice can be found on the Southwark Council website at <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/housing/private-rented-housing>. If residents have a problem with their accommodation, they are advised to report it to their landlord or agent first (unless landlords have been violent or threatening) in which case they are advised to come straight to the council.

If the landlord or agent doesn't respond or carry out works within 1 week (or 24 hours in urgent cases) tenants are advised to contact the council. The council will respond within 2 working days or the next working day in serious cases.

The Council's enforcement powers are under the Housing Act 2004 and the **Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)**

The HHSRS allows the Council to consider up to 29 different hazards when deciding on what action is required to achieve compliance with the Housing Act. These hazards are split into Category 1 and 2 hazards. The Council has a duty to take appropriate action when the highest risk hazards (category 1 hazard) are found. With Category 2 hazards the council can take appropriate action, considering factors such as;

- the occupancy of and any regular visitors to the dwelling e.g. vulnerable residents.
- the views of the occupiers
- whether the premises are occupied by certain groups, such as drug and alcohol dependent people in a hostel.
- where there are multiple hazards.

In addition, the Council's licensing schemes ensure that rented homes in Southwark meet the correct standards. This enables the council to provide the necessary support and information to landlords and tenants.

There are two types of privately rented properties in the borough which require a licence:

- Houses or flats shared between a group of unrelated people or let as individual rooms, also known as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs); some properties converted to flats are also HMO's and will need a licence

Properties let to a single family, couple or individual (including studio flats) when they're located in one of the selective licensing areas

## Appendix 6

### Responsibilities: Operational – RSOs:-

#### Advice and Education

- Tenancy checks currently every 2 years – has been the policy for last 4 years
- 624 properties was not able to access
- Three reasons for tenancy checks 1. Tenancy audit 2. Pastoral care 3. Property check
- RSOs will just turn up and knock door x 3 times
- 4<sup>th</sup> visit they will leave a card if still no response they will send a letter
- If none of the requests are responded to enforcement is taken up
- Injunction – rarely force entry
- Tenancy Agreement changed in 2010 which says that they have to let RSO's in
- New Tenant has a 6 week tenancy check – script - RSO ask if they want FS officer check.
- 2 year TC programme – script 12-14 questions (we have requested a copy of check list)
- FS that is discussed – Smoking – overloading electrical – clutter rating
- 33,000 visits 2013/14
- Leaseholders – intelligence lead – reported for concerns about internal works – banging – building works

- Right on entry
- Absentee landlords
- Can deal with retrospective changes to property
- Air BNB (commercial lettings) is prohibited in Southwark Council
- Leaflets went out to leaseholders re No commercial lettings Air BNB

More

- Training for RSOs – need to develop training – online and half day sessions
- New RSO induction training – in house
- 6 weekly estate inspections with residents – 85% attended with resident present
- Communal repair officer – asset management
- 75 RSOs – average patch 700
- Robertson and Ramatu may have info on employing the fire safety wardens at Ledbury

**Acknowledgements:**

**Fire Safety Scrutiny Panel Members**

(Without their effort, the completion of this scrutiny project would not have been possible)

Mrs Pascale Brad  
Mrs Jean Davies  
Mr Andrew Eke  
Mrs Pauline Hall  
Mr Tai Gators Hassan  
Mrs Teresa Lloyd  
Mrs Jeanette Mason  
Mr Patrick McNeely  
Mr Ian Richie  
Mrs Sue Slaughter

**Staff:**

Lynne Ottaway -Reid

Report prepared on behalf of the Residents Fire Safety Scrutiny Panel and Southwark Council by:-

Graham Turner

Independent Fire Safety Consultant