
Meeting Notes

**All TRA Meeting
Fire Safety Review
22 February 2018
6-8pm**

Tower Hamlets Professional Development
Centre (PDC), 229 Bethnal Green Rd,
London E2 6AB

Susmita Sen, Chief Executive, THH opened the meeting and welcomed residents and guests:

- Steve Dudeney, London Fire Brigade, Borough Commander Tower Hamlets
- William Manning, Director of Asset Management, THH
- Ann Otesanya, Director of Neighbourhoods, THH
- Neil Isaac, Director of Finance, THH
- Julie Selhep, Head of Property, THH

This session continues the discussion on fire safety started last summer and helps residents influence the development of the approach and communications around fire safety.

Steve Dudeney, London Fire Brigade, Borough Commander Tower Hamlets

Steve spoke about the LFB approach to dealing with prevention, tackling fires, regulation and enforcement.

Steve is local to the area with 20 years of his 31 years service to the LFB being in Tower Hamlets. Has been meeting with THH regularly and reports that all of the measures he wanted to see in his time as Hackney Borough Commander after Grenfell have been addressed in Tower Hamlets so the approach is good. The THH buildings, management and access do not give Steve cause for concern and the THH buildings are in a good position and are some of the best buildings in the Borough. Steve confirmed:

- There is a very thorough approach to fire risk assessments by THH
- The blocks are regularly visited by the LFB to check items such as access, dry risers, layouts
- There is an understanding by THH of the importance of fire stopping and how alterations and refurbishments can affect this
- There is a good response by THH to any concerns raised by the LFB

Steve advised residents to make themselves safe by being aware of the risks (which are in more detail on the LFB website) including:

- Making sure fire alarms were working
- Getting a free home visit from the LFB where smoke alarms can be provided and advice given

- Sensible smoking practices
- Reducing risks such as not drying washing too close to portable heaters
- Making sure white goods are working properly, not subject to a manufacturers recall and washing machines not left on when residents are out
- Reporting dumped rubbish

'Stay Put' is still the advice if there is a fire in the block which is not affecting you. There have been around 25 serious fires in high rise blocks in London since Grenfell and stay put has helped keep people safe and fire fighters to tackle the fire. In these fires, the buildings have performed as they should with the 'concrete box' construction containing the fire.

Q. If residents see fire hazards or questionable fire safety practices in commercial units such as shops beneath blocks, what should they do? (Location of particular concern supplied to LFB)

A. Report it to the LFB as soon as possible and they will visit. The units will need to have a fire risk assessment in place.

Q. How can the dangers of fireworks be tackled?

A. It can be dealt with as antisocial behaviour by the Police and THH. LFB can also enter properties if they suspect there is a fire.

Q. Should residents be reporting BBQs to the LFB if they are concerned?

A. It is a judgement call depending on the size, location and impact but LFB can be contacted. There should be no BBQs happening on balconies and this should be reported. BBQs in enclosed gardens and wells is generally okay however depends on the size and the impact of the smoke. The attending officer will make a judgement call but the LFB do not want to interfere with peoples enjoyment when there is limited risk.

Q. Can the LFB attend residents meetings?

A. Yes, please get in contact with the LFB. It is quite often better to get the local station officer to attend who has the local knowledge.

Q. Can we have the evacuation plan for Oswell and Doughty House?

A. There is no evacuation plan as it is a Stay Put block. Residents should know their own evacuation arrangements if they need to. LFB do not want residents to evacuate if they don't need to as they come out into areas that are potentially dangerous with smoke, can trip in a panic and hinder fire fighters progress in tackling the incident.

Q. Should residents be campaigning for retro-fitting sprinklers?

A. THH and LFB fully understand residents' concerns. The first priority is to get the fire stopping measures completed. The Hackitt enquiry will make recommendations and the Council will respond if funding from government is available. LFB support retro fitting sprinklers in areas of risk (and not for example in staircases) and understand that there are many considerations to take into account when managing blocks. Sprinklers will not stop smoke spreading.

William Manning, Director of Asset Management, THH

Will talked about the ongoing process of managing fire risk and the strategy that is being developed which will be published in two months' time when all details have been pulled together. All buildings require some work to varying degrees.

The latest round of Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) started in June 2016 and all 911 blocks have a FRA. 400 have been published on the website and the rest will follow. There was a demonstration to residents on how to locate them through the website on the interactive map.

There are five risk ratings from the lowest 'trivial' which is likely to only be given to new build properties with no alterations to the highest 'intolerable' where the block would have to be evacuated and the LFB would be serving a prohibition notice. THH blocks have been given the middle risk ratings with nine having substantial risk and works are in progress on these. The other 902 blocks are rated as 'moderate' risk and require works such as door closers, new front doors, fire stopping for example and the aspiration is to get all blocks rated as 'tolerable'.

The FRAs identify works that need to be completed and these will be delivered over the next four years through:

- Including the fire safety works in the ongoing five year investment programme
- All blocks having certain types of works completed to ensure compartmentalisation of fire such a new front doors and fire stopping
- Buildings not falling within the Investment Programme and needing fire work and will be delivered on a risk basis.

External Wall insulation (not the same as the ACM used on Grenfell) is being removed from two blocks as a precautionary measure following investigations. The Council decided to remove any possible risk and the external wall insulation will be removed by April.

Q. Can leaseholders stop fire safety work from being completed?

A. No for fire safety work that is needed.

Q. Will leaseholders be charged for fire safety work.

A. The fire safety work has been identified as necessary maintenance and is therefore chargeable. Neil Isaac advised

that the Council have a duty to collect charges so unless the Government state they don't expect charges to be made as in the case of some cladding replacement, leaseholders will be charged.

Q. Do you inspect gas pipes?

A. THH complete visual checks of the gas pipes running up the outside of the buildings. These are the responsibility of the gas company National Grid so any concerns can be reported to them. Faults on external gas pipes will not lead to the build-up of gas so there is no risk in that respect. THH complete gas checks on boilers and the gas pipework annually.

Q. Fuse boxes are sometimes broken into, could this cause a fire?

A. If fuses removed it causes an inconvenience but the break in the supply would not cause a fire. Julie to follow up the robustness of the box and warning signage required

Q. What is the position on smoke alarms?

A. All tenants should have a smoke alarm. The Major Works programmes put hard wired smoke alarms in otherwise a battery operated one should be in place. Last year THH introduced a fire alarm check to make sure they are working. The LFB will install a free fire alarm during a home safety check.

Ann Otesanya, Director of Neighbourhoods, THH

Ann spoke about the people element of fire safety and the education, reassurance, support, guidance and enforcement that goes with managing blocks.

Following Grenfell the approach was face to face discussions with residents by Neighbourhood Housing Officers and checking of blocks for obstacles etc. This was prioritised with higher block first and the 34 blocks 10 storeys and above. THH are taking a pragmatic approach to obstacles and items in corridors as understand the need for residents to feel safe and secure and enjoy where they live however there are some no compromise areas such as grills across shared areas, combustibles and obstacles which will impede escape.

To speed up the visits to the next 93 blocks between six and nine storeys, THH have introduced an additional team from January 2018 for 12 months to make the visits to blocks and call on all residents. This has been funded by the Council and the objective is to gain access to all properties (tenant and leaseholders) to check things like fire and smoke detectors are in place and working, fire doors on the kitchen and front entrance are in place, any alterations that have been taken place and if any lifestyle issues are likely to cause a fire risk. The Council adult social care service have also made additional resources available to support residents with lifestyle risks as they

recognise that this is likely to involve longer term support. The LFB also provide support and will make visits.

Ann spoke about nationwide issue of leaseholders front doors needing to be compliant with fire guidelines and how this was problematic to enforce as leases put the flat front doors into the ownership of the leaseholder. Ann talked about the liaison work and incentives on offer to leaseholders such as waiving THH inspection fees and providing access to our contractors who buy doors in bulk and can offer competitive prices and fit the doors for them. Ann also advised that legal action is being taken against seven leaseholders who do not have a fire safe front door. The LFB have been very helpful in supporting this work.

Ann detailed the issues of alterations to properties and that the Council have redrafted the policy in relation to this to make it clearer. This is a big piece of work and THH have had some early successes in taking action.

Work is also underway to tackle the letting of properties to multiple people under such schemes as Air B&B. The council is consulting on introducing a Houses in Multiple Occupation Licencing scheme which will assist if implemented.

Parking remains a challenge within the Borough and work is in progress to deal with enforcement.

Q. Who is responsible for removing bulk rubbish?

A. whoever put it there. The Council do provide a free service. THH will attempt to educate and take enforcement action.

Q. Do tenants have to tell you when they make alterations.

A. Yes, they have to seek permission. They do have rights to make some improvements but must ask for THH consent.

Q. Where do residents report concerns or items of dumped rubbish?

A. Please contact the Housing Services Centre so it can be logged, sent to the right team for action and progress monitored.

Neil Isaac, Director of Finance, THH

THH have been working closely with the Council who have been enormously supportive.

Additional resources have been approved at the full Council Cabinet Meeting the day before (21/2/18) so it is breaking news that £26m has been allocated over 5 years for fire safety work which is more than double this time last year.

Fire safety works are not that expensive when compared to other elements of works such as replacement roofing

Other feedback:

- Increase fines when people are caught dumping rubbish
- Going house to house and identifying vulnerability is a fantastic initiative
- Emergency information in the fridge was a good initiative and should be promoted again
- The estate based repairs day was well received so can you consider doing that again
- Fire safety works should not be optional for leaseholders
- Residents really do need to play their part in fire safety and THH should be encouraged to go after those people who don't play their part.

Susmita closed the meeting and advised that the next meeting will include engagement by staff on estates. The meeting agreed to meet again in six months' time. The Frequently Asked Questions that are currently published on the THH website were passed around and Susmita requested comments so they can be updated to reflect the needs of residents.

Questions TRA Members were asked to consider

What questions would residents like the London Fire Brigade Borough Commander to answer in the next edition of the resident magazine, Open Door?

- Fire Safety Tips – i.e. blocking communal areas and who to call, no BBQ on balconies, no fireworks – explain the risks
- Fire alarms – when should they be tested
- LFB home safety visit – what do you do?

How can THH communicate effectively with the TRAs and residents on fire safety?

- Communicate what you are doing on fire safety works
- Provide training to TRA members on fire safety, Fire Risk Assessments and major works
- Multi-channel approach to reach all audience types and preferences – direct letters, brochure, posters in notice boards, Open Door Magazine, Twitter, Website, email
- Consider combined door knocking with TRAs and Housing Officers
- Produce updated contacts/info on cards for each resident
- Signage in blocks and lifts with few main points – change regularly to give series of messages
- Low rise blocks are also concerned about fire safety so include them
- Residents would be really pleased to hear what work is being done and the £26m allocated to fire safety works by the Council
- Tailored advice for each block and cover the lesser known things such as the need to have a fire safe door on kitchens