

Board 3 November 2009

Fire Safety

Report by Chief Executive

For decision

1. Background information

Board Members will be aware of the tragic loss of life due to a serious fire at Lakanal House, Camberwell in London on 3rd July 2009.

The incident has heightened awareness of the fire safety standards within high rise housing blocks by Central Government, the Fire Service and the media. This has obliged public and private sector landlords to review and challenge their understanding of fire safety within their own housing stock.

The Chief Fire and Rescue advisor, Sir Ken Knight was asked by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (CLG) John Denham MP to provide an independent overview of progress with the investigations regarding the fire and report back as a matter of urgency.

YHN was asked to respond to a CLG request for information on what we were doing in relation to fire safety within our high rise buildings and how YHN will respond to suggested areas for consideration highlighted by Sir Ken Knights initial report. (see Appendix 1)

YHN has also responded to requests from the Tyne and Wear Fire Service for information regarding fire risk assessments and fire safety standards within our high rise buildings. (see Appendix 2)

This report details YHN's work towards managing and improving fire safety within high rise blocks and sheltered housing.

It confirms action taken as a result of our rolling programme of fire safety risk assessments (commenced 2007), major work to install intumescent strips and smoke seals and our fire safety training programme.

The report makes reference to our working relationship with Tyne and Wear Fire Service and our role in forming a consortium within the North East to share good practice and review new initiatives.

2. Issues and concerns

- 2.1 Your Homes Newcastle manages a variety of high rise and sheltered accommodation on behalf of Newcastle City Council.

The accommodation was built over a period of years and each property complied with the building and safety regulations applicable at the time of construction.

This has meant that most buildings have been constructed to a different standard and the Fire Safety Risk Assessments (in place since 2007) have identified a range of differing levels of fire safety provision within those buildings.

This does not mean that any of our high rise or sheltered premises have failed an inspection or are in poor condition but it is the case that most would have a different level of provision if they were to be built today.

Members should note that YHN do not manage any buildings of the same or similar design and construction to that of Lakanal House.

It is also the case that all YHN's high rise and sheltered accommodation was built on the principle of 'compartmentalisation' and benefits from fully fitted fire doors allowing residents and visitors to remain in secure, smoke proof areas.

YHN and the Fire Service have introduced a programme of pre-planned inspections to YHN properties to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

YHN's Chief Executive, Director of Tenancy Services and Fire Safety Officer have met with representatives of the Fire Service to discuss YHN's response to CLG and the Fire Service. Quarterly meetings are now scheduled.

- 2.2 Many of the actions identified during the Fire Safety Risk Assessments and other inspection processes are procedural or are low cost and managed within the normal repair and maintenance programme.

Other actions can involve major expenditure such as the three year programme already approved by Board to replace smoke seals and intumescent strips, replacement of wet risers and upgrade of fire alarms in sheltered accommodation costing in the region of £1.5M in total.

Currently there is discussion as to whether self closing devices should be fitted to individual flat doors. This programme alone will result in considerable expenditure perhaps in the order of £500,000.

Whilst there are regular changes to fire safety legislation it is the case that no additional funding is made available to allow YHN to carry out improvements or upgrades and any proposals must compete with other major works including the Modern Homes programme.

Again, whilst none of our buildings are sub standard with regard to fire safety it would cost many millions of pounds to bring them all to current 'new build' standards.

3. Progress so far

- 3.1 In 2007 YHN appointed a Fire Safety Officer to undertake a full survey of high rise and sheltered premises producing detailed Fire Safety Risk Assessments highlighting actions for local managers and maintenance and improvement instruction to our technical maintenance section.

Over 100 fire risk assessments have been completed and we are now commencing a three year rolling programme of re-inspection in addition to the annual inspection of a small number of higher risk properties.

An audit trail is in place detailing all risk assessments allowing analysis of the progress of work identified during those assessments.

A programme of mandatory Fire Safety training is embedded within the organisation with courses tailored to the requirements of different staff groups and delivered by the Fire Safety Officer.

The Fire Safety Officer reviews fire safety issues with on site staff, senior managers, technical and maintenance, city design, external contractors and the fire service to ensure compliance with legislation.

The Fire Safety Officer is involved at the design stage of any major programme.

- 3.2 The Fire Safety Risk Assessments have generated a substantial number of improvement actions including:-

- All dry risers have been inspected and tested during 2009 and a four yearly rolling inspection programme is now in place.
- All wet risers were tested during 2008 and an annual inspection programme is now in place.
- Board has previously approved a three year programme of work to ensure that all communal fire doors in high rise blocks and sheltered accommodation are fitted with smoke seals and intumescent strips. This is a three year programme (commenced in January 2009) and is running to schedule.
- Board has also approved the replacement or upgrade of fire alarms within all sheltered accommodation.
- All replacement windows within high rise stairwells are to be fitted with a smoke detector within the stairwell which will automatically open the top window for smoke ventilation.
- A programme to equip a number of high rise buildings with emergency lighting has been agreed.
- YHN staff assess all high rise buildings for signs of damage or misuse on a daily basis and this work is complimented by a monthly inspection by Neighbourhood Services. Any issues are reported and appropriate repairs carried out.
- An inspection programme has been initiated to ensure that appropriate fire separation is in place within the communal areas.

3.3 Further work to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of a range of fire safety related issues is in place including:-

- Fire separation within common areas and within flats
- Standardisation of fire doors within the common areas
- Fire retardant paint programme
- Fire alarm systems within common areas
- Fire alarm systems within rented property
- Emergency lighting within common areas
- Window design and smoke ventilation to stairs
- Self – closing devices to flat doors

3.4 The Fire Safety Risk Assessments, introduction of new legislation and consultation with the Fire Brigade and other professionals identifies improvements to be undertaken.

This detail is held on a central database and is prioritised by the Fire Safety Officer in consultation with senior YHN officers and technical staff.

Much of the work is managed by the local manager or through the normal repairs and maintenance programme.

There will be occasions, however when high cost improvements may be identified and it is proposed that these works be reported to Management Team or Board to prioritise within the wider spending constraints of the organisation.

4. **The Business Implications**

Mission and Strategic Objectives:

- Support and Care to Communities
- 3 Star Excellent Service
- Refurbishing and Building Homes

Value for money/efficiencies: Work undertaken follows agreed procurement processes and in the case of the refurbishment of intumescent strips and smoke seals is the subject of a fixed term contract with City Build.

Resources (financial, property, technological or human): Fire safety activities including staffing, repair and maintenance and improvements are funded from existing budgets. Given the priority of some of the actions required virement from other budgets may be required.

Impact on services/performance: Improved fire safety precautions and procedures would enhance the safety in the blocks for tenants and residents. This should impact positively on tenants satisfaction.

Outcomes for tenants/leaseholders: Improved fire safety.

Risk (reputation, relationship): Our failure to manage fire safety could have a major impact upon the lives of tenants. Additionally, failure to make adequate provision would leave us at risk of prosecution.

Environmental: Effective fire prevention will reduce environmental impact through spread of fire.

Legal: Our approach is designed to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and other fire related legislation.

Equality and Diversity: In carrying out assessments on the effectiveness of the range of fire safety related issues consideration is given to the needs of the range of tenants resident in the block for example, signage, emergency lighting, evacuation procedures.

Stakeholder Involvement/consultation: We will consult with tenants in advance of any work being carried out in blocks. We have promoted keeping you safe in your home in Homes + People (Autumn 2009 edition) and we will be holding a number of fire safety roadshows with the Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service, dates to be announced.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Board is recommended to:

- agree our response to date and overall approach to dealing with fire safety issues in multi storey blocks;
- agree that work to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of a range of fire safety issues is completed along with consideration of the funding of that work.

6. Implementation

- Reports relating to Health and Safety are delivered to Board on a quarterly basis and to Management Team on a two monthly basis.
- The Health and Safety Committee meets every six months and the Health and Safety Team meets formally with the Director of Finance and Resources (Health and Safety Champion) on a monthly basis.
- Reports on specific issues will be prepared as they arise.

Contact Officers:

If you have any questions about this report that you would like clarifying before the meeting, you can contact Paul Hickey on 0191 278 8665 or Doug Gall on 0191 2784383 or by email paul.hickey@yhn.org.uk or doug.gall@yhn.org.uk

**John P Lee, Chief Executive
Your Homes Newcastle**
YHN House, Benton Park Road
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7LX
Tel: 0191 278 8671
Fax: 0191 278 8603
Minicom Head Office: 0191 278 7727
www.yhn.org.uk

Our Reference: SM/YHN/RS

Your Reference:

This matter is being dealt with by Steve Murphy who is available on telephone no. 0191 2788712

29 July 2009

Terrie Alafat
Department of Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Dear Ms Alafat

Lakanal House, Camberwell – guidance regarding materials used in improvement works

Thank you for your letter of 10 July clarifying our responsibilities in terms of Health and Safety in our housing stock and the possible implications for us following the tragic fire in Lakanal House, Camberwell.

Whilst we do not have any scissor blocks over three floors we do have 50 high rise blocks of flats and 11 of the blocks of flats have one central stairwell. In December 2008 the Board agreed to allocate major funding to improve fire safety standards in all our high rise buildings and we started a three year improvement programme starting in January 2009. We have completed fire risk assessments to all blocks and have met with and are engaged in ongoing discussions with Tyne and Wear Fire Authority around the improvements and the implications following the fire in Camberwell. I am confident that our continuous improvement programme, dialogue with the Fire Authority and our advice to tenants places our multi storey tenants in the best possible position as regards health and safety and their protection from the effects of fire.

Up until now in carrying out improvements to our multi storey blocks as part of our Decent Homes Programme we have been using powder coated aluminium double glazed units for block window replacements. At our Property Committee of 20th July we discussed the potential to make savings of around £250,000 per block by switching to the use of UPVC double glazed units and this would put us in a similar position to our neighbouring authorities. I understand

that while there was an original assertion in some quarters that the windows in Lakanal House had been plastic and had contributed to the vertical spread of the fire through melted plastic droplets this has now been discounted and it has now been confirmed that the windows were powder coated aluminium. We have deferred any final decision about changing materials pending professional advice about any potential increased fire risk as a result of installing these plastic windows and in light of the investigation into the Camberwell Fire.

No one as yet has been able to assist us with a definitive answer with regard to any potentially increased risk from using UPVC and I am conscious that Sir Ken Knight's investigation may take some time. We have contractors already on site awaiting our decision before proceeding. I have a very real dilemma here and am conscious that we run the risk of wasting millions of pounds if we were to carry on with the installations as planned, for Sir Ken Knight at some point in the future to then recommend the replacement of all windows containing plastic following his investigation. Conversely, delaying the work would also involve significant major costs, be catastrophic for our contractors and be a disappointment to tenants.

I would welcome any advice you can give me in helping YHN move forward with this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the left of a vertical red line.

Steve Murphy
Chair
Your Homes Newcastle

Our Ref: DG/AHS

Your Ref: PT/PC09

This matter is being dealt with by Doug Gall, Fire Safety Officer, tel 278 4383

04 August 2009

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Capeling
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service
Service Headquarters
PO Box 1196
Nissan Way
Barmston Mere
Sunderland
SR5 9BL

Dear Assistant Chief Fire Officer Capeling

RE: Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

I am responding on behalf of John P Lee, Chief Executive Your Homes Newcastle, to your letter dated 21st July 2009. As Fire Safety Officer for Your Homes Newcastle, I regularly discuss fire safety issues with members of your Community Fire Safety and Technical and Protection departments and will continue to liaise with them on the issues raised in your letter.

I have carried out 90 fire risk assessments between May 2007 and July 2009. Of the 90 risk assessments, 34 have been carried out to high rise buildings and 4 to medium rise housing blocks. I have a programme of inspections and risk assessments planned for the remaining YHN buildings including 9 high rise buildings and 7 medium to low rise buildings within the year 2009/2010. No risk assessments are planned to be carried out at present on the three Cruddas Park multi's that are being refurbished or the one that is empty. I have a risk based programme for re-inspecting all YHN properties, either on an annual or three yearly basis.

All premises managers are responsible for monitoring the fire safety standards within their buildings and they are recommended to audit their fire risk assessment annually. Fire Risk Assessment folders including: the fire risk assessment, guidance notes, test record sheets and building plans have been produced and delivered to each building. Action plans have also been produced indicating where improvements to fire safety procedures, maintenance or improvements should be carried out. The action plans have either been completed or are being actioned by the appropriate department manager or by the Technical and Maintenance department.

**This correspondence is available in Braille,
large print or on audio tape if requested.
Please telephone 278 8633 to arrange.**

YHN have approximately 50 high rise buildings of flats and a number of medium or low rise buildings. 11 of the high rise buildings have one stair. (see attached list). Each flat within high rise buildings is designed to be a fire compartment.

Within the fire risk assessments carried out to all YHN high rise buildings it has been identified that smoke and fire separation are key factors in maintaining a safe means of escape for all tenants.

In January 2009 a 3 year project was started to fit (approximately 6500) smoke seals and intumescent strips to fire doors within the common areas of the high rise buildings. As at 29th July – 12 blocks have been upgraded.

Of the single stair blocks, 3 of the 11 have been fitted with smoke seals and intumescent strips to the doors affecting the means of escape. ie:- **Moorland, Beaumont and Brockwell Courts.**

As a priority I have arranged for the appropriate doors within all single stair high rise blocks to be fitted with smoke seals and intumescent strips.

All doors to the stairs and within the passageways (and the areas surrounding the doors) are of a suitable fire resistant standard and fitted with a positive action self – closing device (a number of double swing doors have been identified as requiring up-grading or replacement). A number of the doors to the bin chutes have rising butt hinges fitted which require regular maintenance to ensure that they function correctly (reasonable standard).

When these buildings were built there was no requirement to fit self – closing devices to the flat doors. Apart from Molineux and Grafton Court there are no YHN high rise buildings that have self – closing devices fitted to the flat entrance doors. YHN would expect the tenants to close their flat door if they evacuate due to a fire situation. (part of the fire procedures information)

A small number of fire separation defects have been identified during the fire risk assessment inspections and these have or are being actioned by the Technical and Maintenance department.

A small number of tenants who have bought their flats have changed their entrance door. This issue has been identified within the risk assessments and action recommended.

A large percentage of YHN high rise buildings have been fitted with new double glazing units. YHN have a rolling programme to replace all glazing within high rise buildings. Information received from the projects team indicated that 9 of the 11 single stair blocks have been fitted with double glazed windows. The two outstanding, Vale House and Shieldfield House are programmed for upgrade during 2009.

A number of the buildings have been fitted with windows that automatically open when activated by smoke detection which will allow smoke ventilation from the passageways or stairs. The windows in the stairs in the remainder of the blocks are opened manually. All new projects will have automatic ventilation fitted.

All dry (56) and wet risers (7) within YHN buildings are inspected on a regular basis. A full inspection and pressure test to all our risers have been programmed, starting in September 2009. Subsequent periodic tests have also been programmed. All tests will meet British Standards recommendations for testing dry and wet riser systems.

Additional safety checks

Concierge staff carry out daily checks to ensure that all communal areas and means of escape routes are free from combustible materials and fire doors are functioning correctly. All faults are reported and repairs actioned.

Neighbourhood Services maintenance teams also carry out regular checks to all buildings systems.

Information to Tenants

Fire safety advice is provided to all tenants of YHN properties on acceptance of the house or flat (tenants pack). Within YHN high rise buildings the nationally agreed fire procedure “**Stay Put**” policy is in place. All YHN high rise buildings have a fire procedure notice on each floor landing, normally located adjacent to the lifts. Regular fire safety advice is provided to tenants via the YHN website, letters, posters, tenants meetings or in person at the Community Housing Offices.

List Of High Rise Buildings Designed With One Exit Stair

	KQP ref	Premise	Date Fire risk assessment completed
1	KQP/163	Mill House High Rise	03/08/07
2	KQP/226	The Spinney High rise sheltered scheme	07/08/07
3	KQP/145	Harehills Tower High Rise	29/10/07
4	KQP/133	Brockwell House, High Rise	30/01/08
5	KQP/165	Moorland House, High Rise	30/01/08
6	KQP/131	Beaumont House, High Rise	30/01/08
7	KQP/130	Adelaide House, High Rise	31/01/08
8	KQP/184	Vale House High Rise	03/04/08
9	KQP/170	Proctor Court High Rise	15/04/08
10	KQP/229	Tom Collins House	16/10/07
11	KQP/173	Shieldfield high rise	In progress

Conclusion

Having carried out a large number of fire safety risk assessments within high rise buildings controlled by YHN, I am satisfied that the fire safety standards are reasonable and YHN will continue to improve the fire safety standards within all our properties to meet current fire safety standards and legislation.

I would be pleased to assist the fire service in any way to ensure the safety of YHN staff and their tenants are safeguarded.

Yours sincerely



Doug Gall
Fire Safety Officer
Your Homes Newcastle

