

Briefing note

16 December 2013

Subject

Lakanal House Fire - Briefing Note

Brief for

Fire Services Management Committee - January 2014

Author

Commissioner

This briefing note has been produced to inform the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) of the work undertaken since the London Fire Brigade (LFB) received the Coroner's 'Rule 43 Recommendations' relating to the Lakanal House fire. These recommendations arose from the inquests into the deaths of six people during the residential high rise fire in south London in July 2009.

In addition to the commitments made by the Commissioner in response to the Coroner's recommendations (see Appendix 1), Members of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) have established a cross party working group to review and oversee all of the Brigade's actions following the Lakanal House incident. This group, called the Lakanal House Working Group (LHWG), meets every two months and receives regular updates on the progress against the agreed action plan. Since its inception the group has initiated a range of activities aimed at improving safety within residential high-rise buildings and is seeking to secure wider engagement with the key agencies who either have a direct responsibility or support role in managing high-rise residential properties.

The inaugural meeting of the LHWG was held in July 2013 and detailed below is a synopsis of the activities that have been driven by this group over the last 6 months.

- Letters from the LFEPA Chairman and Commissioner to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – these letters sought clarification and further guidance from the Fire Minister and DCLG on the following issues:
 - The definition of the term 'parts used in common' in buildings containing multiple domestic premises
 - Whether the Fenestration Self Assessment Scheme (FENSA) is an appropriate means for certifying compliance with Building Regulations in tall residential buildings
 - The definition of the term 'window' as detailed in the FENSA scheme
 - Spread of fire over the external envelope of the building (Requirement B4 of the Building Regulations refer)

- When and by whom the firefighter controls for lifts are to be tested and maintained
- How the ‘responsible person’ should assess that the risk assessor has sufficient training, experience and knowledge to undertake a suitable assessment of the risks in complex and high risk premises

NB: Further to writing these letters officers have now met with staff from DCLG to discuss and clarify these issues in more depth. The brigade has also recently received an encouraging correspondence from DCLG setting out the Government’s enforcement expectations in relation to fire hazards in residential premises. This supports the LFB’s position that Landlords can and should enforce on Leaseholders to maintain the fire safety integrity of the premises.

- To undertake a review into whether building control processes with local authorities are effective in protecting the fire safety integrity of a building during significant refurbishment projects. This review has highlighted that more should be done to raise awareness about building related issues that significantly influenced the fire development and its rapid spread during the Lakanal incident.
- The production of a communications plan that aims to further engage residents and influence housing managers/providers to communicate fire safety information with those living in their properties, as well as complying with their legal responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO).
- To review all of the changes that have been implemented (and those in progress) relating to the way the Brigade responds and manages high rise incidents.
- Develop improved systems of work to ensure that the Brigade follows up on any structural fire safety concerns that have been passed to local authorities following an operational incident.
- Develop a system to routinely share the more significant Fire Investigation reports, highlighting structural fire safety issues, with LFEPA Borough Members.
- For the Brigade to explore opportunities to promote the new approved standards for cable management (arising from the Hampshire Rule 43 relating to the Shirley Towers incident) with the Electrical Safety Council.

The LHWG is also interested in reviewing the maintenance and testing regimes applied to lifts designated as firefighting lifts. The Brigade is currently working with the lift industry in an attempt to influence the scope of the lift testing and maintenance regimes to ensure they include a check of the firefighting lift operating requirements. The group is also interested in raising awareness regarding the risks, in terms of increased fire loading, associated with the build up of paint layers within communal areas of residential high rise premises.

In addition to the action plan and LHWG initiatives the Authority’s Strategy Committee has recently agreed a programme of work that will see further research being undertaken by the Brigade in the following areas:

- The regulation of leasehold properties within high rise buildings, i.e. how landlords are dealing with leaseholders who make modifications to walls and doors, which potentially compromise the fire safety of the building.
- The need for a reorganised Government standard for ‘competent persons’ in relation to undertaking fire risk assessments.
- Undertaking a review of how the Brigade prioritises its regulatory fire safety related inspections of residential high rise buildings.

An element of this research work will involve the LFB reviewing the effectiveness of the RRO from the perspective of the enforcing agency. This work will also bring further focus on some of the issues that the Commissioner has already brought to the attention of DCLG.

The FSMC may also be interested to know that on Tuesday 10 December Southwark Council approved the installation of sprinkler systems in all of its existing sheltered housing schemes and temporary accommodation hostels by September 2016. They also made a decision to install LD2 type automatic battery powered smoke/heat detection in all council homes.

This was as part of an item called Lakanal Inquiry – Sprinkler Feasibility Study, which notes the strong relationship between council and the LFB and discusses the council's response to the recommendation from it's own Lakanal House Rule 43 letter that "the authority consider the question of retro fitting of sprinklers in high rise residential buildings".

The council had committed to undertake a full feasibility study and this was carried out by Frankham Consultancy Group who reported back to the Council on 28 November. The conclusions of this study were that "this feasibility study has identified that in terms of building works associated with the installation requirements it is feasible to install fire sprinkler systems to all of the Southwark Council housing blocks". It states that "LFEPA guidance advocates the provision of sprinklers in domestic dwellings where the most vulnerable residents live" and so did not recommend installing sprinklers in all of its high rise residential buildings. However, the report did recommend the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in the following situations where there are occupants unable to self evacuate:

- Sheltered Housing Units – General Sprinkler Installation (to block)
- Hostels – General Sprinkler Installation (to block)
- General Needs – Personal Protection Sprinklers for those individual occupants identified as unable to self evacuate

Southwark Councillors agreed for sprinklers to be provided with boxed in pipework and the costs given in the report for installation in this way to sheltered housing blocks was £3.3m and for temporary accommodation £1.6m. Ongoing maintenance costs are given at £14k and £10k respectively. An appendix to the Frankham Consultancy Group report gives a list of all the blocks that will be sprinklered under this decision and indicative costs of sprinkler installation. The costs given are on average about £4k-£5k per unit for the boxed in pipework option (considerably more expensive for lowering ceilings) with total annual maintenance at about £60 per unit.