



Because good homes make everything possible

**Building Safety Resident  
Engagement Strategy  
2020-2024**

**Resident Engagement Team**  
January 2020

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## 1. Version details

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## 2. Introduction and objectives

This is Network Homes' first Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy. It focuses on High Risk Residential Buildings<sup>1</sup>, as following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower a new regulatory regime is being introduced for them, many of the principles will apply to other buildings. The strategy sets out our approach to resident engagement relating to building safety for new and existing buildings from 2020-2024 and should be considered the first steps on the path towards meaningful engagement with residents about the safety of their homes. The key aims of this strategy are to:

- Ensure residents are empowered to play an effective role in ensuring their building is, and continues to be, safe;
- Set out the ways in which residents can get involved and the benefits to them from participating in engagement on building safety;
- Identify the building safety information residents wish to be provided with;

<sup>1</sup> A High-Risk Residential Building is a building where the impact of a fire can be catastrophic

- Identify the way in which residents wish to be provided with building safety information;
- Establish methods of improving our approach to engaging with residents in relation to the safety of their home;
- Engage staff with regards to importance of residents' rights to have a say in relation to their homes;
- Clarify our responsibilities and residents' responsibilities to ensure their homes remain safe.

The strategy will be reviewed as part of our preparations for the Hackitt legislation or as changes of legislation come into place, and in response to priorities identified by the building safety regulator.

### **3. Internal and external context**

Following the tragedy at Grenfell in June 2017, the Government commissioned the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt which was published in May 2018. In December 2018 the Government accepted all 53 of her recommendations.

Network Homes has established an internal working group with a view to implementing these recommendations. A large emphasis has been placed on how landlords engage with residents around building safety and this strategy seeks to outline the approach Network Homes will take to engage with and involve residents in the safety of their homes.

In June 2019 the Government published a consultation document setting out how they plan to overhaul the system for high rise residential buildings through:

- clearer responsibilities for those building or managing these buildings;
- a stronger voice in the system and better information for residents;
- greater oversight by regulators; and
- tougher enforcement when things go wrong.

Although the timetable for the introduction of new legislation and implementation of the recommendations is not yet decided, in the spirit of this welcome direction of travel we have taken the decision to implement as many as possible of the recommendations in advance of their going through the legislative process.

The Grenfell Inquiry – Phase 1 Report was published on the 30 of October 2019 with 16 recommendations for either landlords or the London Fire Brigade to review. Network Homes has established a new Building Safety team and we will be reviewing these recommendations and overseeing all required remedial work to our buildings.

### **4. Our approach**

This strategy will detail our approach to engaging and involving residents in relation to building safety across all our homes. This strategy will be further supplemented by bespoke plans tailored to properties where there is deemed to be a need, setting out how the strategy will work in practice for each building.

It has been developed in conjunction with residents, adopting a culture of openness and transparency, to ensure it addresses their needs and requirements. It details what residents can expect in terms of communication and how they can get involved and raise concerns.

To clarify there is a difference between building safety and building security. Issues around the security of a building may arise from the front door of the building being left open (for example). This may then impact on the safety of the building.

The following section outlines our intended approach to engaging with residents around building safety. There are three main strands:

- Information and understanding;
- Resident and landlords' responsibilities;
- Action to take in the event of a fire;

#### **4.1. Information and understanding**

##### **4.1.1 Communication and engagement**

We will use a range of ways to communicate with residents to cater for, as much as possible, the diverse needs of our residents. We will endeavour to make adequate provisions for residents, for example, who have a physical or visual impairment, have other disabilities or who do not speak English on request.

Examples of the way in which we can communicate with residents may include but is not limited to:

- At sign up
- Website
- Portal
- Notice boards
- App
- Text
- Email
- Letter
- Pop sessions to talk about building safety
- Video

We will also ensure we cater for residents at our Older Person's schemes who may prefer face to face meetings to discuss the strategy and the specific action plan for their building. Following all meetings information provided will be delivered to each resident's home. If there are any significant changes to the strategy or action plan, we will update residents during their House Meetings on an annual basis (or more frequently if required).

For residents at our Older Persons Schemes we can share building safety information with their relatives if they request us to.

Where we have identified a serious issue with a building affecting the safety of all residents, we will keep residents updated on a monthly basis in relation to any interim safety measures necessary, remedial works and further investigations that are required. These updates may be in the form of monthly meetings and/or updates on our website and/or monthly newsletters.

A fire action notice is installed within each building.

We will encourage residents to get involved in decision making relating to the safety of their building. If you would like to get involved the Resident Engagement team welcome your input. You can contact them directly at [get-involved@networkhomes.org.uk](mailto:get-involved@networkhomes.org.uk).

Building safety is the responsibility of all residents, as well as Network Homes as the landlord. While we will endeavour to ensure that all residents are aware of key building safety messages it is important that this is reinforced by residents. Where residents see one of their neighbours acting in a way that suggests they have not understood or remembered building safety information they should remind them of it as a matter of priority.

We will seek to work with residents to identify a process that we can implement to measure the success of this strategy and the satisfaction of our residents. One way of doing this may be a reduction in the number of occasions upon which we have to remove fire hazards left by residents in the communal parts of a building. We will commit to reviewing feedback from our residents to ensure we continuously improve the service we provide to them.

#### **4.1.2 Clarity and accessibility of information**

We will proactively provide all residents with the information they need to help them understand the protections that are in place to keep their building safe.

We will ensure that the information provided is sufficient, relevant and in a format that can be understood by residents. As a standard practice we will provide:

- The measures we have in place to mitigate potential fire and building safety risks to residents, e.g. fire precautions;
- Information for residents detailing how they can reduce the risk of fire in individual dwellings e.g. by not storing flammable materials;
- A process for reporting a fire risk and/or raising any other safety concerns;
- Procedures to follow where a fire occurs in the building, including for evacuation;
- The different roles and responsibilities of the accountable person, Building Safety Manager and residents;
- Key information such as the contact details of the accountable person and Building Safety Manager.

Residents will also be entitled to obtain further and more detailed information about the safety measures in their building if they wish and such information may include (but is not limited to):

- Full, current and historical fire risk assessments;
- Planned maintenance and repairs schedules;
- Outcome of building safety inspection checks;
- How assets in the building are managed, e.g. frequency of lift maintenance;
- Details of preventive measures, e.g. smoke alarms;
- Fire protection measures in place, e.g. sprinklers, fire extinguishers;
- Information on the maintenance of fire safety systems;
- The fire strategy for the building;
- Structural assessments;
- Planned and historical changes to the building.

We will implement a process for dealing with requests for information. We will aim to provide residents with the documents they request within 1 month.

Within this process we will provide guidelines to enable vulnerable residents to nominate an advocate, care-giver or representative who can request more detailed information on their behalf.

We will not release draft reports, which by their nature are likely to be subject to change but will aim to release information as swiftly as possible.

Residents who have a concern about building safety can contact our Customer Services Team who will follow our repairs process and arrange for a contractor to attend. Any resident who is not happy with the outcome and wishes to escalate the issue can submit a complaint. We will be looking to introduce a new role of Building Safety Managers, as outlined in the Hackitt report, who would / could deal with these issues.

Residents living in our Older Persons Schemes who report repairs directly to their Scheme Manager can continue to report any building safety concerns directly to their Scheme Manager.

#### **4.1.3 How safety information should be provided at the start of the tenancy**

At the start of every tenancy we will provide a fire action notice within the sign-up pack.

Within 6 weeks of a tenancy starting we will contact residents to discuss building safety and will answer any queries they may have at that point.

### **4.2. Resident and landlords' responsibilities**

#### **4.2.1 Supporting residents and landlords to understand their responsibilities**

Residents have an obligation to work with us to keep their building safe and to let us know of any safety concerns they have identified following the process outlined in this strategy.

Residents are expected to provide reasonable access by allowing us to inspect and carry out necessary works for several types of safety inspections (such as fitting fire alarms) or undertaking fire and structural safety-related maintenance. Where information or access is required, we will provide the resident with reasonable notice. Where access is not provided, we will try several measures to gain access to the property with the final measure being legal action and forced entry. We will look to recover the costs of such legal action directly from the resident.

We have a zero-tolerance policy for residents leaving possessions in communal areas. Any items stored in communal areas may be removed and disposed without notification to the residents concerned.

Within our sheltered schemes we follow specialised housing guidance which involves undertaking people-centred risk assessments to evaluate the needs of individual residents. This enables us to evaluate their specific situations, minimise risks and put in place specific measures accordingly (an example of this is to use visual fire alarms for residents who are hearing impaired).

At high risk schemes we establish specific vulnerabilities for residents within that scheme using a combination of data held on internal systems and questionnaires completed by each household. We will produce a PEEP (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) for the resident. The PEEP is held on site in a premise's information box which the fire brigade have access to in case of an emergency.

We will work with the local fire service to electronically provide any information about the building they require.

In line with our process for reporting safety concerns, any legitimate concerns will be treated seriously, and remedial action will be taken to rectify the issue.

#### **4.2.2 Encouraging residents to keep their buildings safe**

We will ensure that residents are empowered to play an effective role in making sure that their building is, and remains, safe. This includes identifying and reporting hazards that may impact on the safety of the building and meeting their responsibilities to ensure their own safety and that of their neighbours.

Residents are encouraged to assess the needs of their household and any members of their family who may be vulnerable (such as young children or someone with a disability). They are encouraged to ensure they understand the action plan for their building so they know what they should do in the event of an emergency.

Upon advice from fire brigades we no longer provide fire safety equipment (such as fire blankets and fire extinguishers) within either residents' homes or in communal areas. The Fire Service advise that unless individuals have the relevant training on the use of fire safety equipment then they are encouraged not to attempt to fight the fire but to close all fire doors to contain the fire and follow the action plan for their building.

Residents are also encouraged to consider the wellbeing of their neighbours in the building and recognise that their actions may put the lives of others at risk. For example, residents should ensure they do not prop open any communal fire doors and they do not store items in the communal hallway which may impede an escape route in the event of an emergency. Residents must seek permission if they wish to make any changes to their fire doors. Residents who smoke should ensure they do so in a safe place and fully extinguish their cigarettes afterwards. Barbecues and patio heaters should never be used inside buildings, on balconies or in close proximity to any flammable material.

Where residents see one of their neighbours acting in a way that suggests they have not understood or remembered building safety information they should remind them of it as a matter of priority. An example of this could be neighbours who are suspected to be hoarding, who are storing information in the communal hallway or neighbours who may be considered vulnerable. If residents are not comfortable discussing this with their neighbours, they should report it as a building safety concern to us.

#### **4.2.3 Improving communications on safety (i.e reporting safety concerns; works to the property)**

We will work in partnership with residents to ensure that they are involved in decisions about their building's safety and, where possible, provide them with reasonable information on works due to be carried out to their property enabling them to have an opportunity to consult with us.

If any resident feels their concerns have not been addressed, they can follow our formal complaints process to escalate the issue.

#### **4.3. Action to take in the event of fire**

There is an action plan for each scheme with specific details for the action residents should take in the event of a fire. This information is contained on a Fire Action Notice which are on the walls in every building.

All of our buildings are designed to keep residents safe. Buildings are compartmented which means that they are built in such a way to contain a fire within a single room or multiple rooms. This limits the spread of fire, smoke and flue gases. One of the key safety measures to aid compartmentation is

fire doors. It is important that you do not make alterations to fire doors within your home and keep them free of obstruction which may prevent them from closing.

Fire Brigades advise that it is best for residents to keep fire doors closed to contain a fire rather than risking injury trying to fight a fire themselves.

Most tall buildings are designed to contain fire, smoke and heat within individual homes for a long enough period of time to enable the Fire Brigade to extinguish the fire. In such buildings it is safe for residents to remain in their home, as long as it is not affected by fire, smoke or heat, while it is extinguished. This is known as 'stay put' advice. For buildings where this is not possible we will advise of evacuation plans based on our fire risk assessments.

#### **4.3.1 Understanding a building evacuation plan**

A building evacuation plan means that all residents must leave the building and go to the assembly point for the building in the case of an emergency.

#### **4.3.2 Understanding 'stay put' and when it should be used**

All buildings which have been built in such a way as to contain a fire within one of the compartments of the building will have a stay put policy in place. Fire Brigades advise us that the best option for residents is to remain in their own homes, unless that's where the fire started or fire, heat or smoke has spread to their home, rather than trying to evacuate which may result in them being in more danger.

#### **4.3.3 Understanding what "Next place of safety" means**

Any residents required to evacuate their homes should go to the "next place of safety". This means you should move away from the building to a place of safety from a fire or any falling debris.

#### **4.3.5 Evacuating a building safely**

If residents are required to evacuate their homes, they must do so by walking to the safest and closest exit and/or stairway. Where possible, they should close any fire doors behind them. They should never use a lift to exit during a fire alarm activation. Once outside the building, residents must move away from the building and go to the nearest safest place.

The front of the building may be where the fire fighters and fire trucks will be operating. Residents must move away from the building and must not obstruct their access to the building.

If there is an incident occurring on the upper floors and glass is being blown out of the windows, the area below is the hazard zone where serious personal injury will happen. Residents must not remain in or near this area.

Once residents have left the building they must not re-enter until they are told to do so by the fire brigade.

#### **4.3.6 Responding to fire alarms and contacting the fire brigade**

If the fire or smoke alarm in your home sounds, call 999, ask for the fire service and follow their advice. If you hear the fire or smoke alarm sound in any communal area or a neighbour's home, call 999, ask for the fire service and follow the plan for your building.