

When will the Government review Building Regulations?

- As I have already mentioned, My Colleague, Andrew Stunell, intends to set out his plans for the Building Regulations around the end of this year.

Background

The Previous Government had stated that it would not revisit the fire safety aspects of Building Regulations until 2013 at the earliest. This would have led to revised guidance in 2016.

Cost of carrying out a review.

- The cost of carrying out the work set out in this Bill should not be ignored. I referred earlier to the work commissioned by the last Government to look at sprinkler protection in areas of rapid growth such as the Thames Gateway. I understand that this comparatively simple project cost in the order of £100k of taxpayers money.
- To commit many more times this sum to go over old ground so soon would, in my view be an irresponsible use of public resources.

Evidence from other countries – USA

- Much has been said about the experience of sprinklers in other countries particularly in the United States such as the City of Scottsdale in Arizona. The 15 year report from the Assistant Chief Fire Marshal there, suggests that, in those 15 years, there had been 97 sprinkler activations in domestic buildings and that this may have resulted in saving 13 lives.
- My Lords this presumes a death rate of around one in every seven fires. If this were the case in England, then we could have expected over 6,000 deaths per year. The actual figure for Accidental dwelling fires is around 250. It's not clear why there should be such a disparity but it does suggest that direct comparisons cannot easily be made.
- My Lords, you may be interested to note the recent reports from Fargo, North Dakota of a major fire that destroyed much of a sprinkler protected apartment building.
- Whilst, thankfully, there was no loss of life, the 150 or so people who have lost their homes could be forgiven for thinking that the sprinkler system installed in their building was a pointless waste of money. I am not suggesting that sprinklers are without value but this does, perhaps, illustrate that no system is infallible and that looking at isolated incidents can give a distorted view.

Negative Briefing by the Civil Service

- [The Noble Lord implies in his comments that] – The Government's policy on this issue has been influenced by negative briefing by officials.
- Let me make it clear that Government Policy is made by the Government, not by civil servants. My Lords, I can assure you that the officials I have spoken to, have been careful to advise me on both sides of this debate as is their duty under the Civil Service Code.

Water consumption

- The Noble Lord mentioned a figure of 5.6 billion litres of water used annually to fight large fires. On the face of it this is an impressive statistic. However, we are talking today about the typically smaller fires that occur in residential buildings. I wonder also if this is really so significant in the context of our total consumption of well over 16 Trillion litres.

Background

The 5.6 billion litres figure is regularly used by the sprinkler lobby. We have not been able to verify this figure but it is plausible and sprinklers do reduce the amount of water required to fight a fire. The office for National statistics reported that In 1997/98 the UK consumed just over 16.8 billion cubic metres of water. If the figure for fire fighting is to be believed then this constitutes **0.03% of total UK consumption**.

Fire Kills - Funding

- In previous years the campaign has been fronted by television advertising, but this year, the focus is very much on supporting and empowering fire and rescue services and other partners to deliver the messages locally within their communities.
- The national campaign, developed by CLG, will work with partners in the commercial and voluntary sectors to seek out new opportunities, creating hooks that can be utilised at the local level.
- Radio advertising will be used as the primary vehicle to drive the campaign's lead messages of smoke alarm ownership and maintenance to the widest possible audience.

Background

CLG spent £4.4m on the fire kills campaign in the last financial year and had plans to spend £3.4m this year. The revised budget for 2010/11 is £850k.

Lakanal House

- It would not be appropriate to comment on this incident whilst official investigations are still ongoing. Once the full facts are known if there are any lessons to be learned we will of course consider them.

Background

The fire at Lakanal House, Camberwell - a 14 storey block of purpose built flats owned by London Borough of Southwark - occurred on Friday 3 July 2009. Six people, including three children, died. The fire is still under investigation by both the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The Coroner's Inquest into the fire was opened and adjourned on 15 July 2009. On 28 September 2009, Sir Thayne Forbes was appointed to hear the inquest but he has been replaced by Her Honour Judge Frances Kirkham.

Sprinklers (residential) in devolved administrations.

General

- Decisions about standards for fire protection in devolved administrations are a matter for those administrations.

Wales

- I understand that a proposed measure for the provision of sprinklers in new residential buildings is being considered by an assembly committee and that there has been evidence produced on both sides. It will be a matter for the Assembly as to whether or not to support the measure.

Background

Building Regulations are devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland and there are proposals for devolving them to Wales. The Regulatory systems vary as do the supporting technical standards. In relation to sprinkler protection, there are more onerous requirements in Scotland than are applicable in England & Wales.

Ann Jones AM for Vale of Clwyd has used the equivalent of a Private Members Bill to bring forward a Legislative Competence Order (LCO) in relation to the requiring of sprinklers in new residential buildings. This had widespread support in the Assembly and was supported in Westminster. A measure using these powers is now under consideration by the assembly although it is unlikely that this will be supported by the Welsh Government.

Timber Frame Buildings

- The new Government is aware of the concerns about this type of building and will tackle them head-on. We intend to work with industry to establish whether there is evidence of specific risks associated with timber framed buildings and how best to address them.
- We are also actively awaiting a London Assembly report on this issue and will look at its conclusions carefully.

Background

Concerns have been expressed about the nature of fire spread in timber framed buildings both during construction and once the building is completed and occupied.

The Fire Statistics Monitor for the period April 2009 to March 2010 was released on 20 August. This included a new analysis of fires in timber framed buildings, using the first year of data for which construction methods have been recorded. This shows that fires in occupied timber frame dwellings tend to have a larger area of damage than in other dwellings. However, there was no difference in rates of occurrence, fatalities and casualties when compared to other forms of construction.

Sprinkler protection is not viable for buildings during construction and they would have only a limited benefit in completed buildings as the main route of fire spread is within voids in the walls and floors of the building that cannot be protected in this way.

Potential repeal of fire protection provisions in local Acts

- A focused consultation on proposals to repeal certain fire protection provisions in local Acts has now closed. The Government is considering the responses to the consultation and, as yet, no decision has been made.

Background

The local Acts contain a wide range of miscellaneous provisions – dealing with such things as street trading, dog fouling, parks etc. Around 28 of them have one or more specific provisions for fire precautions which are in addition to national building regulations (for England and Wales) requirements and apply only in the area that the Act covers. The local Act provisions impose costs from additional fire protection and from additional administrative procedures. They can also create procedural problems where developers choose to use an Approved Inspector.

Whilst the fire protection provisions of the Acts vary, they tend to include typical provisions which give Local Authorities the discretion to impose additional requirements for fire protection which are more onerous than would

be required in national building regulations for warehouses, car parks and tall buildings. In 2005 a study, commissioned by the Department, concluded that although there was evidence that these provisions had some effect on reducing property losses, they have **no statistically significant impact on life safety.**

There are also provisions for Local Authorities to ensure that fire and rescue service (FRS) appliances can gain access to a site. National building regulations only deal with appliance access within the site boundaries. **The proposal under consideration is to repeal provisions relating to large storage buildings, car parks and tall buildings but to retain the provisions relating to FRS access.**