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Hazards*

Summary

This Note is intended for internal use, providing information and guidance on sheltered housing.

This Note is one of a series produced by Fire Safety Regulation HQ Policy Groups to provide additional advice and guidance to officers and Fire Safety Teams on various subjects related to their role.

Where appropriate this Note should be used for learning and staff development purposes.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Since the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, known as the Order, there has been an overlap of the legislation applicable to residential buildings. The Housing Act 2004 is the primary piece of legislation for residential premises as it deals with the whole building, including the individual dwelling units. The Order only covers the parts of domestic premises used in common by the occupants of more than one dwelling, apart from the use of Article 31(10).

2 What is Sheltered Housing?

- 2.1 There is no real definition of sheltered housing but this FSIGN covers any domestic premises where the premises consists solely of residents who are there due to either, age, mobility, medical condition and /or are receiving some kind of care package.
- 2.2 Sheltered housing is also characterised by the use of communal areas where some services are provided. The premises may have wardens, managers, or other staff that provide facilities for the residents including security, cleaning and catering staff.
- 2.3 This definition does **not** include residential care homes that are registered as a care home with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 2.4 This definition also does **not** include general needs housing where some residents are receiving a type of care package.
- 2.5 The domestic parts of sheltered housing are private dwellings and as such the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Order) does not apply apart from Article 31(10). However, the Order will apply to the shared or communal areas and in accordance with Article 9 (7) (b) the fire risk assessment should detail "any group of persons identified by the assessment as being especially at risk". This would ensure that vulnerable residents in their own domestic premises are risk assessed for their needs in terms of evacuation and escape when and where required.
- 2.6 These premises house some of the most vulnerable people and it is important that this is recognised by the fire risk assessment. The assessment should also outline the evacuation strategy for the premises.

3 Issues for Inspecting Officers

- 3.1 In these type of premises there are a number of common issues that require a consistency of approach by Inspecting Officers as enforcers of the legislation. These include :
- The front doors of flats
 - Smoke control/ventilation systems
 - The use and storage of Mobility Scooters
 - Furniture in Communal Areas
 - Fire Alarm in sheltered accommodation
 - Evacuation Strategy

4 Protected Routes

- 4.1 Staircases, corridors, lobbies, balconies and external areas may all be classed as protected routes. This term is fully explained in British Standard (BS) 4422:2005 in paragraph 3.635 on page 57. The definition is;

Route, designated for use as an escape route, which is separated from the remainder of the building by fire resistant construction, kept clear of combustible items or materials, and which leads to a place of ultimate safety.

- 4.2 From this definition and the definitions of the other terms in the phraseology, it is clear that walls, floors and ceilings have to meet the criteria for fire resistance as noted in any definition of this term. The standard for fire resistance of compartments is dealt with in a number of documents but most commonly in the guidance that supports the Building Regulations, Approved Document B (ADB). In particular those comments in B3 and Table A1 and A2 with regard to the performance criteria for those specified elements.
- 4.3 If the elements of structure are recommended to achieve a standard of fire resistance of up to 60 minutes then any openings in walls should meet a fire resistance of at least half of that element in accordance with Table B1 of ADB. Therefore, in order to protect the escape route and meet the definition of the term "Protected Route" openings in walls where "Stay Put" policy has been adopted should be protected by fire doorsets that provide at least 30 minutes fire resistance.
- 4.4 It is understood that older guidance documents may have reduced the criteria above to a lower standard, a "notional" fire door and that some existing fire door sets may not have been tested to modern test criteria. In these cases, the fire risk assessment for the premises should take this into account and note their existence.
- 4.5 Any other openings in walls around the older types of doorsets should also be subject to the fire risk assessment process and be commented on accordingly. Inspecting Officers need to take note of the details in the assessment with regard to doorsets, if available, and if not, use professional judgement when making a decision on the fire resistance of these elements.
- 4.6 Service ducts, cupboards in the stairway and pipe work must maintain the same level of fire separation/compartmentation. IOs should pay attention to holes in partitions made by pipe and cable runs which should be effectively sealed by the use of fire resistant materials or proprietary devices such as pipe collars

5 The Front Doorset of Flats

- 5.1 Where the front doorset is part of the fire safety measures to safeguard the protected route, the Order applies to the front door and its surroundings including glazing or other partitioning above or to the side of the doorset.
- 5.2 The front doorset is a component of the protected route which is part of the general fire precautions of the building. Article 17 details that general fire precautions facilities need to be maintained and the Responsible Person may make arrangements with occupiers of other premises to ensure that this is undertaken. This applies even if the other premises are not premises to which the order applies. e.g. Domestic premises.

- 5.3 Where deficiencies in protection to the protected routes are found during an audit, the Inspecting Officer should seek to have these rectified. This can be achieved by either notifying the responsible person of the deficiency and having the work actioned at that time or where necessary by service of a notice. The terms of the notification or notice of the failure will be, "that part of the common general fire precaution of the protected route, that extends into private domestic accommodation (i.e. private flats) does not provide the route with adequate protection in case of fire and that the responsible person has not taken appropriate action to ensure protection to the escape route". The remedy will be for the responsible person to either make arrangements with the occupier of the flat, or to enforce the terms of any lease, or to utilise legal routes open to them to ensure the protected route is maintained in good working order. Notifications and notice schedule entries will be under Article 17 and a model text is provided for this purpose. FSR Central Enforcement Group should be consulted about use of the text.
- 5.4 Where the front doorset belongs to a leaseholder, or on the rare occasion a freeholder, then due to the control they can exercise over the front doorset, it is considered that under the Order they become a 5(3) person and those duties are placed upon them. In these cases the Authority can serve notices on them but before doing so any notice must be referred to the FSR Central Enforcement Group.

6 Smoke Control Systems in Residential premises

- 6.1 Recent fires and inspections of premises have demonstrated that in some cases automatic smoke ventilation systems installed in residential buildings are not operating correctly. For example, vents on floors other than the one where a fire has occurred can open allowing heat and smoke to travel into that floor rather than out of the building. Brigade officers have also found that in some cases, natural ventilation of common corridors, lobbies and staircases by more simple means such as windows or permanent vents is also being removed, obstructed or otherwise compromised.
- 6.2 Ventilation of escape routes, combined with limitations on travel distance in the corridor, is designed to assist means of escape for both the occupants who have escaped from the flat that is on fire and for others who may choose to escape subsequently. Ventilation arrangements may also be there to assist fire-fighters to gain access to the floor of the fire incident. As a result it is extremely important to design and maintain these features so that they operate correctly and safely.
- 6.3 Depending on the number of stairs and the age of the property, ventilation is normally fitted into either the stair lobbies or corridors that form the common access area to the resident's flats. The systems used can range from a simple permanently open vent arrangement in older buildings through to manual and automatically opening windows in others. Some ventilation systems are operated by automatic fire detection which is not part of a fire alarm system but solely for use in opening the smoke control system to the building when smoke is detected in the areas where the detection has been installed
- 6.4 In more recent buildings or those that have been upgraded, natural or mechanical smoke extract systems can be employed using smoke shafts or 'chimneys'. In some cases, where the building may have only one stair, or where extended travel distances are present, these may be mechanical single or two-speed systems with pressure sensors and override controls.

- 6.5 The expectation in purpose built blocks of flats is that if the smoke ventilation system is automatic and heat and/or smoke enters the common parts on the floor where a fire has started, the smoke ventilation system for the premises will vent that heat and smoke to allow the protected routes to continue to be safely used for a reasonable period of time.
- 6.6 In the case of an automatically opening vent system into a smoke shaft, if smoke is detected, the door to the smoke shaft on that floor should open, together with a vent at the top of the shaft and also in the stair at the roof level. This creates a chimney effect allowing the smoke to vent to open air.

7 Mobility Scooters

- 7.1 There is an increase in use of mobility scooters throughout the United Kingdom and there are fire safety concerns and issues arising from this increased use. The 'Fire safety in purpose-built Blocks of flats Guide 2011(PBBF)' issued by the Local Government Group gives some guidance on this as does BS 9991 2011. Issues that can arise are with regard to storage of the scooter and the charging from the electricity supply of the scooter.
- 7.2 The charging of an electric mobility scooter should not be conducted within a protected route. However, due to space and building restrictions in many buildings it is often the case that people will, out of necessity, leave mobility scooters in protected routes and charge them through extension leads from their own flats. In these cases, the Authority will accept the following as compensatory features.
- (a) A marked storage area that does not impede the protected route with no charging facilities, or
 - (b) A 30 minute fire resistant store that does not obstruct the protected route which incorporates a permanent charging point within the store area.
 - (c) Appropriate fire suppression system.

8 Furniture in Communal Areas

- 8.1 Any furniture provided in a communal area should be tested and labelled in accordance with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989 and 1993).
- 8.2 In BS 5588 Part 1 Clause 17.4.2 the following recommendations are made:
- (a) At least one storey exit from each ground storey communal area should be a final exit.
 - (b) Furniture may be provided in common corridors only if:
 - (i) the section of corridor containing furniture is separated from the remainder of the corridor by fire-resisting construction;
 - (ii) the area of the section of corridor containing furniture does not exceed 10 m²;
 - (iii) the section of corridor containing furniture is not a dead end;
 - (iv) the width of the section of corridor containing furniture is not reduced to less than 1.0 metre by the furniture.

9 Detection and warning systems including fire alarms and automatic detection.

- 9.1 A warning and detection system, in the communal areas, incorporating automatic detection and manual intervention which is designed and installed in accordance with 'BS 5839 Part 1: Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings. Code of practice for system design, installation, commissioning and maintenance, Category M/L2', as a minimum standard should be provided where it has or is considered necessary. This incorporates manual call points at all storey levels, all exits and at travel distances in accordance with the standard of provision of the date of the installation, and fire detection in the circulation spaces e.g. corridors and staircases as well as in any communal rooms that lead directly off a corridor and in any other areas.
- 9.2 The standard current at the time of design and build of the premises may well have been a system installed that met an older standard such as the previous versions of the BS or the 3 versions of the 2002 publication or the 1988 publication.
- 9.3 The BS 5839 Part 1 system could have smoke or heat detection in the hallway of the domestic premises as part of that communal system to give indication of fire in a particular dwelling to protect the escape routes and give warning to others of a fire.
- 9.4 Rooms that are likely to produce false alarms should be fitted with heat detection e.g. communal kitchens, laundry rooms. The fire alarm system should be connected to an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) and the system monitored for false alarms. The premises managers should have procedures in place to deal with false alarm calls and to ensure that the Authority does not have to deal with unwanted fire signals. (UwFS).
- 9.5 In order for a "Stay Put" policy to be effective the warning and detection systems in the common parts of the block should not trigger a planned or unplanned evacuation if the alarm is activated. Therefore, the activation of the alarm system may not necessarily activate the sounders as well, a staff alert system may be in place. Alternatively, as the audible warning level for sleeping risk is 75 dB(A) at a bedhead and where the system is not designed to wake others for a fire in a single dwelling, then 45 dB(A) in the flat (referenced from the PBBF Guide) may be an acceptable level. This would be dependent on the comments in the fire risk assessment (it should be realised that fire doors and other doors when set in the closed position may reduce the sound pressure levels of a detection and warning system by as much as 30 dB(A)).
- 9.6 In the domestic areas e.g. individual flats/rooms the recommended standard is for mains operated smoke and heat alarms to British Standard 5839 Part 6 to be of Grade D (mains operated with a rechargeable battery backup) LD2 system. The sound level at the bedhead to be 75 dB(A), this may mean that a sound level of 85 dB(A) may be required from an alarm sounder to achieve this high level of audibility at a bedhead. All new alarms that are installed should be fitted with a remote hush and test switch as part of the system to avoid occupiers having to stand on chairs or steps in order to silence false alarms. In cases where the internal layout is poor and occupiers have to pass through higher risk areas in order to get out of their flats, there will need to be more than one smoke and/or heat alarm interlinked with each other to provide a satisfactory system for life safety.
- 9.7 This detection and warning system should ideally be connected to the 24 hour emergency control centre (social alarm system) for mobile staff to be dispatched and/or staff within the building to be called to the scene of any fire.

- 9.8 An assessment of the occupancy should be undertaken on an individual basis to ensure that the recommendations detailed in the British Standard can be met, for example, sound levels of 75 dB at the bed head (with doors shut, the audibility of the warning can be attenuated by a door particularly a fire door by as much as 30 dB) should be achieved. Additional measures to compensate for particular disabilities should also be considered such as vibrating cushions and strobe lighting as well as any specific need that warrants connection of the alarm to a social alarm system. The social alarm should meet BS EN 50134 Part 3:2012: Alarm systems. Social alarm systems. Local unit and controller, such as a Telecare or Redcare system, or any previous recommendations from superseded standards should the occupier have difficulties in responding to the local alarm.
- 9.9 Inspecting Officers should consider contacting the Area CS Team for a Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSVs) to be undertaken where other issues are identified, such as hoarding.

10 Evacuation Strategy

- 10.1 In almost all cases of sheltered housing there will be a stay put policy, this can only be achieved through the provision of adequate compartmentation. All wardens and managers should ensure that residents and visitors understand the strategy for the premises.
- 10.2 There may be times when residents cannot self evacuate from the premises due to a number of issues. These may be temporary or permanent.
- 10.3 There are a number of ways the risk to these persons can be addressed..
- (a) As a minimum, information should be provided to operational fire crews on arrival, a Premises Information Box (PIB) can be used for this purpose. This could include plans of the premises, information on vulnerable people and their home address and the premises entry code.
 - (b) The use of fire retardant bedding, BS 7175:1989 refers.
 - (c) A remote indicator outside of the individual flat to allow attending fire crews to identify the BS 5839 Part 6:2004: Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings. Code of practice for the design, installation and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in dwellings, system that has operated if it is not connected to a social alarm system.

11 Sprinklers

- 11.1 LFEPA has a sprinkler position statement, that where appropriate, fully supports the use of sprinklers to reduce fire deaths and injuries.
http://hotwire/operations/regulatoryfiresafety/sfs_notes.asp
- 11.2 When and where appropriate, Inspecting Officers should recommend the use of sprinklers or other suppression systems. This action should be documented and uploaded to Farynor.
- 11.3 Where a bespoke system for an individual has been installed or is being considered within a dwelling, IOs should ensure that the local Borough Commander and/ or the Area CS Team are aware of these installations. The fire risk assessment and

evacuation strategy should include details of where this type of system has been installed. It is likely that these have been installed as a control measure where individuals cannot self evacuate.

12 Fire Fighting Equipment

- 12.1 The use of the premises is such that they can be classified as a place of work with or without 24 hour cover by wardens, managers or other staff. Therefore, fire fighting equipment in accordance with [Chief Fire Officers Association \(CFOA\) Circular 2008/1007](#) dated 28 April 2008 should be provided. The provision of fire fighting equipment should be considered as part of the fire risk assessment using the following guidance to determine the minimum levels of equipment required.
- 12.2 A minimum of two extinguishers per floor based around a figure of one for every 200 square metres and at distances of no more than 30 metres apart. Additional extinguishers may be required in specific risk areas, offices as an example, although careful consideration of the general location can help reduce the number required.
- 12.3 Carbon dioxide (CO₂) extinguishers may be appropriate where there is a specific electrical risk e.g. laundry room, kitchen. One carbon dioxide extinguisher can cover more than one room if located appropriately.
- 12.4 The provision of a Fire Blanket conforming to BS 1869:1997: Fire Blankets or BS 7974:1999: Type 1 heavy duty fire blankets and type 2 heavy duty heat protective blankets should be provided in each kitchen mounted on a wall 1.5m high adjacent to an exit door away from the cooking facility. It should be noted that fire blankets are no longer recommended in BS 5306 Part 8:2012
- 12.5 All fire fighting equipment should conform to BS EN 3 and all of its constituent parts with regard to conformity and quality of production controls of portable fire fighting equipment and BS 7863:2009: Recommendations for colour coding to indicate the extinguishing media contained in portable fire extinguishers.
- 12.6 Arrangements should be made for the extinguishers to be inspected once a year in accordance with the current BS 5306 Part 3:2009: Fire extinguishing installations and equipment on premises. Commissioning and maintenance of portable fire extinguishers. Code of practice. This would ensure that a competent person qualified under British Approvals For Fire Equipment (BAFE) – National Approvals Scheme for the servicing of Fire Equipment, or an equivalent accredited third party conformance standard would undertake these inspections and tests. Records of the tests should be maintained for any future inspections of the premises.

13 Emergency Lighting and emergency escape lighting

- 13.1 An Emergency Lighting or Emergency Escape Lighting system conforming to BS 5266 Part 1: 2011: Emergency lighting. Code of practice for the emergency escape lighting of premises, should be provided illuminating stairways, corridors, and other exit routes to allow persons to make their way out of the premises safely.
- 13.2 The system should be independent from the main supply in accordance with the recommendations of the standard and meet the requirements for duration and illumination in accordance with BS 1838:1999, BS 5266 Part 7:1999: Lighting applications. Emergency lighting. The testing and maintenance arrangements should

be detailed as part of the premises Fire Policy and in accordance with BS EN 50172:2004, BS 5266 Part 8:2004: Emergency escape lighting systems.

14 Ducting

- 14.1 IOs should ensure that ducting (extractor fan ducting from bathrooms or service ducting in communal areas) has been identified and checked to ensure the correct standard of fire resistance is maintained for the location. Details of these systems should be referenced in the fire risk assessment for the premises. It is also essential that there is appropriate fire stopping where ducting passes through compartment floors and walls. This fire resistance should match that of the compartment that the ducting passes through.
- 14.2 Commercial kitchen extract ducting should be maintained in accordance with TR/19 HVCA Guide to Good Practice Internal Cleanliness of Ventilation Systems, which should ensure that ignition and fire growth from grease and oil deposits in extract equipment is minimised.

15 Fire-fighting facilities

- 15.1 Details of these can be found in FSIGN 420 .

Document History

Impact assessments

An Equality or Sustainability Impact Assessment was completed on:

Equality Impact Assessment	xx/mm/yyyy	Sustainability Impact Assessment	xx/mm/yyyy
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

NB: This document MUST only be amended with consideration of the content in FSIGN 420 where there is a commonality of advice that must be harmonized to ensure consistent guidance.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date