

## Briefing Note on Fire at Lakanal House (Southwark)



- Block was constructed 1958-60 & featured in Architect's Journal due to quality of design.
- 16 storey – 14 floors of accommodation (plus undercroft with plant level)
- 98 maisonettes – each with escape balconies located on even-numbered floors
- Access corridors servicing alternate (odd-numbered) floors only
- Building served by single communal staircase & 2 lifts (only 1 of which was working at the time of the fire )
- Dry rising fire fighting main installed with outlets located on communal lobbies
- Cross-ventilated corridors and lobbies
- Flats in “scissor “ arrangement
- Flats all 2-storey maisonettes - flat entrance, bedroom & bathroom on lower floor, living room, kitchen & emergency egress via 2 balconies located on upper floor. Timber staircase within flat – cuts into cross section of common corridor
- Mixed tenure block consisting of Council rented flats & leasehold flats
- Full-height widow façade on external envelope of building

Southwark's records indicate that numerous refurbishments have been undertaken over the years including but not restricted to the following -

- Introduction of suspended ceiling in 1980s,
- security doors in the 1990s,
- major refurbishment including window facades in 2006/7.

Tragically this fire resulted in 6 deaths which clearly led to much discussion about the cause, the contributing factors and most importantly what action is required to ensure fire safety in high-rise residential blocks. At the conclusion of the Inquest into this fire the Coroner made a number of "Rule 43 recommendations" to the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG). These recommendations cover the following areas. Further, I have also outlined the TMO's current position / approach -

1. Information & guidance for residents – recommend that DCLG publish consolidated national guidance in relation to the "stay put" principle and its interaction with "get out stay out" including how such guidance is disseminated to residents

TMO currently

Information on Website, Residents Handbook, occasional articles in The Link, letters to new tenants accompanied by LFB leaflet on Home Fire Safety Visit, regularly agenda-ed & discussed at all sheltered schemes etc. Some other landlords provide a DVD to residents – should we consider? Any other suggestions?.

2. Information & guidance for emergency services – including requirement for landlords of high-rise residential blocks to provide information to the Fire Service at or near the premises advising on layout etc.

TMO currently

Trellick Tower is our most complex building and is always on the LFB's radar. Recent familiarisation visit undertaken by LFB and a Premises Information Box installed where plans, copies of keys to communal windows etc. are kept. Have discussed with LFB and as yet no requests for these boxes on any other TMO blocks.

3. That guidance be issued to extend the scope of the Fire Safety legislation to include fire risk assessments within dwellings

TMO currently

Legislation does not require this presently. Where concerns are raised about fire in individual dwellings these are investigated by the fire assessor / TMO surveyors as appropriate.

4. Consider retro fitting of sprinklers in high-rise blocks

TMO currently

Recently asked the LFB to confirm where they require sprinklers to be fitted and as yet no requirement to retrofit in high-rise blocks. A number of other landlords, most notably Southwark, have commissioned feasibility studies, however, they have confirmed that there is currently no resources to fund this.

5. Review Approved Document B of the Building Regulations - clear reference to External Fire Spread

Whilst we cannot be sure how DCLG will respond to these recommendations it is considered unlikely that they will make existing legislation more onerous especially if this requires landlords to undertake significant as yet un-resourced works.

#### Shirley Court, Southampton – Fire on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010

This fire occurred in a high-rise residential block located in the middle of Southampton and resulted in the deaths of 2 fire fighters. Following the Inquest the Coroner here has also made some Rule 43 recommendations. Specifically, request to DCLG to write to all social housing landlords bringing these to their attention –

- Consider removal of all surface-mounted plastic trunking used to protect & support fire alarms in common parts and replacement with a system that withstands the same temperature as the cable  
AND

#### TMO Response

It is likely that this will be referred to the British Standards Institute for inclusion in a standard. Therefore, I have raised this with Asset & Regeneration and we are now investigating the use of a fireproof alternative to this plastic conduit & cable clips for use in schemes going forward.

- Social housing providers should be asked to consider retro-fitting of sprinklers in all existing high-rise blocks in excess of 30 meters particularly those which the Fire Service consider to be of complex design

#### TMO Response

See 4. Above.

The committee are asked to consider what further initiatives the TMO could consider / introduce in order to further promote fire safety with residents.

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