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Paper 2

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Contents

Aim	2
NWFRS Response	2



**Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Fire and Rescue Service**

Aim

This briefing note provides an initial written response to the terms of reference set by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry on fire safety in high rise blocks.

To report aims to answer the questions set in the terms of reference by the committee as follows:

- How has the private sector responded to concerns about fire safety in high rise residential blocks?
- What is the extent of remedial work that needs to be done to meet fire safety standards in Wales, and what arrangements are in place to cover the costs?
- How are leaseholders/residents in Wales being informed about recent developments and reassured about fire safety measures in their block? More broadly, to what extent are residents' views about fire safety being listened to and addressed?
- What, if any, additional practical or financial support is needed from the Welsh or UK Governments to help ensure high rise blocks are safe?

NWFRS Response

How has the private sector responded to concerns about fire safety in high rise residential blocks?

The private sector buildings in our area did not immediately identify themselves with the risks posed by the Grenfell tower incident. The properties, in our area, are all significantly lower (less than 10 stories) or, with the exception of one known property, are not clad in any form of cladding or were using a simultaneous evacuation strategy.

As NWFRS has identified and audited premises of 5 or more floors they have found a good level of compliance, level 1 and 2. This level of compliance suggests premises that are managing their fire risk and ensuring fire safety measures are maintained and appropriate for the risk.

What is the extent of remedial work that needs to be done to meet fire safety standards in Wales, and what arrangements are in place to cover the costs?

We have 16 premises that fall into the category of 5 or more stories private residential properties with only one premises, in this category, which has been identified as containing combustible cladding (not ACM).

The premise, which has been identified as requiring remedial work, was identified as being built to a greater height than the original building regulation plans. This meant that 2 areas of the building were now, greater than 18 m in height , (total height measured as less than 19m). Had this information been provided originally then different fire safety measures and standards would have been asked for, via a building regulation submission. Additionally the management company identified that the cladding used, on parts of the building, was classified as flammable. This cladding was not ACM cladding, but did not conform to class A2 of the European standard. Both of these issues are still to be resolved due to a change in management at the site.

The remainder of premises, in this category, are built using traditional methods and most are less than 7 storeys. In some cases an element of remedial work is required to enhance fire safety measures though this is mainly limited to replacing doors or enhancing an alarm system. The age and construction methods in the remaining properties, in this category, are such that any remedial work required would be at a cost that would not be prohibitive. We would expect this remedial work to take the form of replacement front doors (at approximately £500 per unit), fire stopping and extensions of existing fire alarm systems.

How are leaseholders / residents in Wales being informed about recent developments and reassured about fire safety measures in their block? More broadly, to what extent are residents' views about fire safety being listened to and addressed.

Over and above WG and UK Government information, we have included an area on our website to provide fire safety advice to residents. We continue to provide Safe and Well checks where requested by occupants and fire safety advice to leaseholders/ responsible persons following fire safety audits.

Our Arson Team are visiting known risks around high rise premises. The Arson team have been working with property owners and the local councils to remove arson risks. They also give advice to property owners to reduce the risk of arson and improve site security. We record and address any complaints received as soon as possible with all required outcomes being proportional to any deficiencies found.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire NWFRS contacted and engaged with owners/ RP's for sleeping accommodation over 5 storeys to provide both legislative and community safety advice. None of these premises were identified as having ACM cladding. In many cases the Community Safety department worked jointly with BFS at these premises and offered Safe and well Checks to residents.

What, if any, additional practical or financial support is needed from the Welsh or UK Governments to help ensure high rise blocks are safe?

NWFRS would welcome any additional support to enable the Business Fire Safety team to continue to engage with residents and monitor the fire safety within high rise residential premises. NWFRS also believe that this level of engagement should be widened to include all premise types greater than 5 storeys. Currently activity is targeted at high risk premises due to defined resources.

NWFRS are not aware of any building owners who require substantial financial investment to improve the fire safety in their buildings due to the presence of combustible cladding.