



## Fire Safety on the Barbican Estate – Information for Residents

FAQ No. 3

December 2017

*(new or amended FAQs appear in italics/red. We have added a section at the end of this FAQ titled “What can you do”?)*

Since the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, we have been asked a number of questions by residents. We felt it would be useful for everyone on the estate to see these questions, and our answers.

Get in touch with us

If you have any further questions, please contact the Estate Office. Staff there will be happy to come to your home and show you your fire escape route if you have any doubts about how to evacuate the building if your home is affected by a fire.

If you have more general concerns or questions about fire safety, then please email to [barbican.estate@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:barbican.estate@cityoflondon.gov.uk) stating the subject ‘Fire Safety’.

You will receive an acknowledgement within two working days. An officer will be allocated to look into your concerns and you will receive a full response as early as possible.

**Q** How often does the City of London Corporation carry out fire checks on its residential blocks?

**A** Previously, our policy has been to commission independent Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) every three years, and to have these reviewed annually, by trained staff. However, we have now decided to have new fire risk assessments done by independent specialists every year. Frankham Risk Management Services have been commissioned to carry out new risk assessments on all our blocks, starting in the New Year.

*Previous FRA’s carried out on the City Corporation’s residential blocks have been a Type 1 FRA as required by legislation. It has been decided that the new FRA’s will be Type 3. A Type*

3 FRA, which goes beyond the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, covers everything required for a Type 1 FRA but also provides for an assessment of the arrangements for means of escape and fire detection (i.e. smoke alarms) within a sample of the flats (typically around 10%). A Type 3 FRA is non-destructive but the fire resistance of doors to rooms within the flat is considered.

All Estate Managers and Estate Officers are trained in fire risk management and carry out monthly and weekly checks to address any hazards that emerge during the year. All our cleaners have been trained to identify potential fire risk and are expected to report anything they see as part of their day to day duties.

Q Can I see the most recent Fire Risk Assessment for my block?

A Yes. Links to fire risk assessments for each of the City's residential blocks can be found on the City of London website, on the page for the estate: [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk)

If you do not have internet access, please ask your House Officer to print a copy for you. All questions and comments received regarding the Fire Risk Assessments have been sent to our independent specialists Frankham Risk Management Services.

Q How can I keep up to date with information about fire safety on the estate?

A New pages are being set up on the City Corporation's website and can be found at [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/housingfiresafety](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/housingfiresafety). All information will be posted there and updated regularly. These FAQs will be updated regularly. There will also be links to other useful information.

Anyone who does not have internet access can contact their House Officers to print off any updates for them.

As projects to improve the fire measures of buildings are progressed, updates on these will be included in our weekly email bulletins. If there are developments that all residents must be made aware of, we will write to all households. But, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Q What should we do if a fire breaks out in our building? The current advice is confusing and we don't know whether we should evacuate or stay put.

A The advice given by the London Fire Brigade is that people are usually safer staying in their home BUT that they should leave if fire or smoke is affecting their property and it is safe for them to do so. This is the advice we give in all our literature.

The advice we, and the Fire Service give if there is a fire in your property is:

alert everyone in your property

leave, shutting all doors, without locking them

if possible, alert neighbouring properties

leave the building

call 999 and wait for the fire service to attend. If safe to do so, wait by the entrance of the building to meet the fire service and to prevent anyone else entering the building.

Q How do we get informed in the event of a fire?

A Fires occasionally happen in residential premises. Neighbouring properties are rarely required to be informed as the incident is concluded swiftly, without the need of others to be alerted. Residents are protected in their property by the fire protection afforded by the buildings structural design. In the highly unlikely situation of having to evacuate a whole building, the fire brigade or the police would, if necessary go floor by floor and knock on doors.

Q Does everyone know how to get out of the building if they need to?

A Fire escape routes are clearly signposted and emergency lighting is regularly checked. We do advise all households to make themselves familiar with fire escape routes. If you are unsure of yours, then please contact your House Officer and someone will visit you to show you.

Q Since there is no fire alarm, how will the Fire Brigade inform us should we need to be evacuated?

A The Fire Brigade have confirmed that in the highly unlikely situation of having to evacuate a whole building, they would, if necessary go floor by floor and knock on doors.

Q Is the City Corporation proposing to introduce fire drills for residents across its estates?

A The fire service does not recommend carrying out fire drills on estates as this is extremely difficult to manage. Instead, we are offering to make a home visit to any household requesting it and to show residents their escape route.

Q What do you do to identify and help elderly and vulnerable people in an emergency?

A We are proactive in trying to identify all residents who may need help in an emergency situation, and we make their details available to the emergency services. We also work very closely with our social services colleagues, to share information and to make sure people are supported.

However, it is difficult for us to know all the people who live on our estates, especially in leasehold and privately let properties. If you have anyone in your household who might need extra help in an emergency, then please let us know straight away so that we can update our records and let the emergency services know. This is vital.

Q Does the fire service have access to information about vulnerable people?

A Yes. Every block has a fire box, accessible only to the emergency services, and this contains information on flats where there may be people needing greater support. This is updated whenever we are made aware of a change, by the resident, their family, Adult Social Care Team, the City Police or any other agency.

Q The emergency services all rely on postcodes to reach us and this can be problematic considering the inaccuracies of postcodes in our part of the city. What is the position?

A The emergency services do not rely on post codes. When speaking to the call handler, who could be in any part of the UK; you will be asked for a postal address with the road where the incident is in and main road intersecting this. It is then looked up on a digital map to confirm.

Q Should residents keep fire extinguishers in their kitchens?

A We do not advise this as different types of extinguishers are needed for different fires. Fire blankets are also not recommended. We do advise that heat detectors be fitted in kitchens and smoke detectors in halls. The London Fire Brigade offer free home safety visits which we encourage residents to take up. You can contact them directly:

<http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/>

Q There are fire extinguishers in the communal areas, will we receive training in how to use a fire extinguisher?

A At this time, the City is not planning to provide fire extinguisher training for all residents.

Q How fire resistant are our front doors and is the City Corporation going to replace them?

A Most of the doors on our properties are original, and have around 20 minutes resistance to fire. We are carrying out a feasibility study to survey all doors and plan a programme to replace all those which have resistance of under 30 minutes. **We have identified a number of front entrance doors from each of our residential blocks of flats, including the Barbican Estate that have been, or will be, sent away to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for rigorous fire resistance testing. This will give us the information we need in relation to the level of fire resistance these doors and frames currently provide and whether or not that level of fire resistance is adequate. Consequently, we will be able to properly prioritise, plan and cost out our door replacement programme. Priority for testing has been given to our tower blocks.**

**Q Is there any history of fires in the Barbican where flat entrance doors were significantly challenged?**

**A To the best of our knowledge, and certainly within the last 32 years, a fire has never breached a front door in the Barbican.**

Q Do you plan to install sprinkler systems?

A A feasibility study into the potential installation of sprinkler systems in our tower blocks has been commissioned from our consultant, Butler & Young. The first draft of the report has been submitted and this is being analysed by staff in the Property Services Team.

Q What about fire detection and smoke ventilation in communal areas?

A The London Fire Brigade continues to advise against the installation of fire alarms in communal areas but, this will be reviewed over time as part of the new FRA process.

Q Shouldn't every home have a smoke alarm?

A All City Corporation tenants' homes are currently part of a programme of electrical testing and rewiring. As part of that programme, hard-wired fire detectors are being installed.

The London Fire Brigade advises that all flats should have a working smoke alarm. They can help with this – more information can be found at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/SafetyAtHome.asp> or by calling 0800 028 4428.

Q Will leaseholders be expected to pay for the improvements and changes made as a result of improved fire safety recommendations?

A There are further serious financial implications for the City in carrying out fire safety improvements. There will also likely be a financial impact on homeowners on the Barbican Estate if these works are undertaken.

Q Can you clarify the position regarding front and rear balconies which are sometimes blocked? How often are they checked? Also, are fire exits checked?

A All balconies are checked annually. It may be that as part of future Fire Risk Assessments this frequency may be increased. Fire exit stairs are checked monthly and, where there are flats, daily by the front-line Estate Team.

Specific FAQs – All flats

Q We know that residents have refurbished kitchens and may have compromised asbestos panels in the common ducts. How are alterations inspected?

A Alterations are subject to Building Control inspections and approval.

Q Is there any fire risk from the underfloor heating system which is very old now?

A All the cables are encapsulated in the floor screed so there is no risk.

Q Is there any fire risk from wooden flooring?

A There are no additional risks from having wooden flooring. The building regulations offer designs for the use of concrete and wooden flooring to ensure the correct fire resistance is achieved to protect the occupants.

Q The electricity supplies in the building are old and many modifications will have been made inside people's flats. Do they need thorough inspection?

A The buildings supply although old, is in excellent condition. For any alterations within your flat, you should ensure that your work is carried out by a Competent Electrician and comply with Building Regulations. They are also subject to inspection.

Q What is the fire proof integrity of the building and fire risks from combustible items in terms of the Plumbers Duct Access (PDAs) and other service ducts – they connect one floor to another, are they a potential fire risk?

A The BEO is seeking further advice from the District Surveyor on this and will advise further. Our current Fire Risk Assessments have not highlighted this as a risk.

Q What is the fire proof integrity of the internal walls and doors inside the flats and the inside of exterior walls?

A The property if unaltered unless by licence, granted by The City and will have satisfied the Building Regulation at the time. Some sub dividing walls, do not have the same fire resistance as external walls i.e. bathrooms where persons do not spend much time in are normally of a reduced specification in all buildings. Internal doors are normally of light weight construction.

We recommend all properties have working fire alarms to warn occupants. The properties fire protection is gained from the external walls and doors creating fire resistant cells.

Q What should I do if I am an elderly/vulnerable person and require additional assistance in the event of a fire (are there any refuge points on the Barbican Estate)?

A In the first instance contact your House Officer, if you have not already done so, so that we can update our records. Furthermore, contact the London Fire Brigade for a Home Visit. You can contact them directly: <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/>

In the event of an emergency please take directions from the London Fire Brigade.

Q What should I do if the balcony paving tiles on the fire escape route are broken?

A Please report them to your House Officer or the Repairs Reporting Line who will have an order raised for their replacement.

Q What is being done regarding items left in the communal parts of the baggage store areas?

A The Estate Cleaners have been asked to report these items during their regular checks.

Q There is no information on the various vertical vents in the building and what role they would play in a fire. Are they all lined with asbestos?

A Some of the ventilation shafts run in fire rated risers while others do not. The ducts which are fire rated are either asbestos or have been replaced with fire rated boards such as Supalux or plasterboard. The ducts which are not within fire rated risers are sometimes lined with asbestos but where possible it has been recommended to residents to make all riser walls fire rated.

The Barbican uses a Shunt duct system in lieu of fire dampers where ductwork penetrates into the flats. The offset between the connection and ductwork would create suitable protection against the passage of fire from one flat to another.

Q How will fire fighters access the balconies since there is no vehicle access to the podium?

A LFB has confirmed that Fire fighters will access the balconies via the Fire Stairs

Q There is a water pump next to my apartment. Has it ever been tested?

A Yes. Twice annually for flow and pressure to ensure it meets the correct British Standards.

#### Specific FAQs – Buildings Insurance

Q The insurance described in the lease covers “re-instatement of the damage”. What assurances do we have that this insurance is adequate to cover re-building Cromwell Tower at current costs?

The City Surveyor is responsible for determining the declared values (estimated reinstatement value) each year. Periodic on-site valuations are undertaken by independent surveyors. In the interim years the City Surveyor applies a percentage to the property portfolio by reference to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors’ Building Cost Information Service cost index and various tender price indicators issued by the top tier cost consultants. An analysis is made on all the data received and a percentage forecasted for policy renewal each year. The policy also contains an provision to allow for inflationary increases during the course of rebuilding.

Q What provision, if any, is made in the insurance for re-housing us while the Tower is re-built?

A There is provision in the insurance policy for short-term alternative accommodation for owner occupiers within the policy. Contents insurance (which we would advise occupiers to effect) would also provide for alternative accommodation.

Q How would the insurance claim work in practice? We are long leaseholders. In the event of serious damage to the building, we would be homeless, and we would also lose our principal asset. Would we be re-imbursed to the full market cost of the flat, plus temporary accommodation?

A Property insurance does not cover the full market value of a building. It provides an indemnity for the reinstatement of the building following insured damage. The lease contains an obligation on the landlord to use the insurance monies to reinstate the property

unless prevented from so doing. There is provision in the insurance policy for short-term alternative accommodation for owner occupiers within the policy.

Q The lease states that the Buildings insurance covers ‘fire and such other risks (if any) as the Corporation from time to time thinks fit’. Can you please let me know whether these other risks include: terrorist acts, arson, chemical contamination (e.g. from asbestos), criminal damage (e.g. damage by drone), damage by aircraft (e.g. hit by a helicopter), flooding, subsidence (e.g. caused by underground excavations), and lighting strike?

A The property policy is written on an all-risks basis of cover. This means that the damage is insured unless excluded (see below) and specific perils are not listed.

Q What exclusions are there?

A The policy contains the following insurance market exclusions: Electronic Risks (damage to data/systems caused by virus etc.), Pollution (unless resulting from a sudden identifiable unintended and unexpected cause), Radioactive Contamination, Sonic Bangs, War and Allied Risks; and

Policy cover exclusions for damage attributable to: a change in the water table or by frost, locked out workers or government seizures, escape of water from sprinklers in unoccupied premises, theft or attempted theft that is recoverable by other means, settlement of ground, construction or excavation works, defective design materials or workmanship, inherent vice and latent defects.

Q Has the Corporation been advised of any changes to the cover since the Grenville Tower Fire?

A There have been no changes to cover as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Q The lease says that the Corporation will insure "unless such insurance be vitiated by any act or default of the tenant". If I understand correctly, that means that there are things that tenants might do, or fail to do, which would invalidate the insurance. What might those be? For example, if a resident stupidly has a bonfire on their balcony, or they fail to take precautions when using welding equipment in the PDA locker, does that invalidate the building insurance? What does this clause mean?

A The clause requires the Corporation, as landlord, to maintain a buildings insurance policy covering loss or damage by fire and other such risks that the Corporation thinks fit and apply the insurance monies received to reinstatement of the damage. However, the clause recognises the fact certain acts which give rise to the damage may result in the insurance policy being invalidated and therefore there will be no pay out by the insurer. The policy does not specify circumstances that vitiate cover. Accidental damage caused by a tenant in the examples provided will not invalidate the policy (as damage is covered unless excluded).

There are provisions in the lease requiring tenants to comply with their covenants in the lease and to indemnify the Corporation against any claims and demands resulting from any breach of covenant on the tenant’s part (clause 4(8)). In particular, tenants covenant not to

do anything which may result in the vitiation of the Corporation's insurance policy or give rise to an additional premium being payable (paragraph 1 to Schedule 6). Therefore, a tenant would be liable to indemnify the Corporation for any losses incurred by the Corporation as a result of the insurance policy being vitiated due to the tenant's acts.

In all insurance policies insurers have a right to pursue a recovery of any outlay made in respect of a claim against a negligent party (subrogation rights). This right is waived in respect of the tenant's demises and common parts (unless the damage arises out of criminal fraudulent or malicious acts), but not in respect of damage caused to other properties.

Leaseholders and occupiers are advised to effect contents insurance. This includes public liability insurance which meets the cost of claims from third parties arising out of the occupiers' negligent acts or omissions.

#### Specific FAQs – Tower blocks

Q I am concerned that, during redecorations, the fire exit doors (tower flats from dining area) may have been painted shut. Will the fire risk assessment look at this?

A Yes and if you have any specific concerns about your fire exit doors please contact your House Officer.

Q Could tower residents access the roofs in an emergency?

A No. The advice from the London Fire Brigade is to evacuate downwards not upwards.

Q What do I need to check with my dining room external fire door?

A There is a key hole next to the break glass. In an emergency you would break the glass. The key is there so that the door can be checked. Keys are available to sign out from BEO reception. Should you have any problems opening this door (which you may if the door has not been opened for a long time) then please contact your House Officer who will have an order raised for this door to be opened by our contractors for you.

Q Is there any mechanism to remove smoke from the fire stairs?

A The top of the staircase is open to the elements with louvers in the doors.

Q Is there mains gas in Lauderdale Tower?

A No.

Q From the Cromwell Tower FRA - "Staffed areas, plant rooms and levels below podium are provided by what appears to be a BS 5839 pt 1 compliant fire alarm system" When was it most recently tested? The alarm in the stores looks to be very old.

A The fire alarm systems are tested weekly for operation of sounders by the resident engineers and yearly for operation of detectors by our contractors. The detectors are

checked annually (a quarter of them, every 3 months) with a diagnostic check of the panel for faults.

Q Since, according to reports, the tallest fire brigade ladder in London won't reach beyond the 26<sup>th</sup> floor. Are there any ladders stored in the Barbican for such a case. Are there plans to obtain such a ladder?

A There are no such ladders stored in the Barbican. The City of London has no plans to procure a ladder that will reach to 42 storeys. Buildings are designed to be accessed internally.

Q Have the closed in balconies on the 3 towers been risk assessed?

A This will be addressed on our next round of Fire Risk Assessments. These enclosures would have all required Building Control approval at the time.

#### Specific FAQs – Frobisher Crescent

Q I live in a flat close to the Barbican Arts Centre. What happens if there is a fire there – how would we know?

A The Barbican Arts Centre is a commercial public building and has a fire alarm system.

Q When was the Frobisher Crescent fire alarms on floors 7 to 9 last tested. We have never heard it tested and thus do not know it can be heard adequately in our flat.

A The smoke detectors in the corridor do not activate an alarm but do, in the event of detecting smoke, release the electric magnets that hold the corridor doors open. This in effect closes the doors. Any activation of this system indicates to a panel in Shakespeare Tower. This system was inspected in July 2017. Fire prevention measures on the 3 staircases are managed by the Barbican Centre.

#### Specific FAQs – Terrace Blocks

Q I live in a sub podium flat in Thomas More House and have no balcony. As such, my nearest escape route is to go down a flight of stairs and exit via a door that leads into the gardens. However this door can only be opened from the inside with the Barbican Key – unlike all of the other communal doors in the block.

A The door that leads out to the garden is not your fire exit. The 2 doors that lead to the car park (at 03 level) can be used as a fire escape route and don't require a key to open them from the inside. There are several examples across the estate, of internal doors that require a key as they are not part of any fire escape route.

What can you do?

We do advise all households to make themselves familiar with their fire escape routes. If you are unsure of yours, then please contact your House Officer and someone will visit you to show you.

If you have anyone in your household who might need extra help in an emergency, then please let us know straight away so that we can update our records and let the emergency services know. This is vital.

The London Fire Brigade offer free home safety visits which we encourage residents to take up. You can contact them directly: <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/>

The London Fire Brigade advises that all flats should have a working smoke alarm. They can help with this – more information can be found at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/> or by calling 0800 028 4428.

Ensure that you co-operate with our inspection regime of the fire exit stairs, corridors, balconies, store and car park areas in maintaining all of these areas clear for access. It may be that as part of future Fire Risk Assessments our policy in these areas may change.

Contact the Repairs Reporting Line on [barbicanrepairs@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:barbicanrepairs@cityoflondon.gov.uk) or 020 7029 3909 to get your ventilation cleaned – we recommend that this is done annually.

Please note that we continue to log the many questions about Fire Safety and we will be updating our FAQs as soon as we can.