



## Safety in your building

8 March 2022

Houblon Apartments,  
6 Tyne Street,  
Whitechapel,  
E1 7AN

Dear residents,

The Hive  
22 Wembley Park Boulevard  
Wembley  
HA9 0HP

[www.networkhomes.org.uk](http://www.networkhomes.org.uk)  
customerservice@  
networkhomes.org.uk  
0300 373 3000

### Fire on 17<sup>th</sup> floor yesterday – next steps and resident meeting

Yesterday afternoon at approximately 4pm, a fire broke out on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the Crawford Building in Whitechapel. We are thankful to the London Fire Brigade (LFB) for attending and are glad that everyone is safe. The LFB is currently investigating the cause of the fire.

As you may be aware, the Crawford Building is the name of the section of the building containing properties from the 12<sup>th</sup> floor and up. We don't own the whole building or any properties in the Crawford Building – our properties are in Houblon Apartments on floors 7-11.

#### What happened?

Again, there is not yet any confirmed cause of the fire and we will let you know as soon as we hear from the LFB on this. We were notified of the fire at approximately 5pm and had several members of staff on-site by 6pm to provide support to residents, and they remained there late into the evening. The fire brigade allowed residents back into the building at around 10.15pm.

We have included a timeline of our response to the events as they happened at the end of this letter, as you may find it useful.

#### Stay put policy and alarm system

We know that some residents have raised concerns that an alarm didn't go off at the time of the fire yesterday. I'd like to assure you that the building performed as expected during this incident. Houblon Apartments has a 'Stay Put' fire strategy implemented by a qualified independent fire engineer. This means you **should stay put during an incident unless you are directly affected by heat, smoke or fire, or if you are directed to evacuate by the fire brigade.**

Under current fire regulations, **fire alarms are not recommended in communal areas of a building with a Stay Put strategy.** The office premises below, which Network Homes does not own, are required to have an alarm because they are commercial premises – this may have been the alarm that some of you have reported hearing.

#### Repairs to water and smoke damage

Three of our properties were damaged by water yesterday and those residents were accommodated in a hotel by Tower Hamlets Council. We anticipate they will be allowed back in their homes today or tomorrow.

#### A summary of this letter

A fire broke out on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the Crawford Building yesterday (the floors above Houblon Apartments). The cause of the fire is currently being investigated by the London Fire Brigade.

If you see any damage to your property which you suspect is from yesterday's incident, please get in touch with us on [customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk](mailto:customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk).

We'd like to reassure you that the building acted as expected during a fire. The building does not need a fire alarm in communal areas as it has a 'Stay Put' policy, recommended by an independent fire engineer.

Network Homes is the 'head lessee' for the properties on floors 7-11. We do not own the whole building and do not own the floor where the fire took place. We also therefore have no legal authority to carry out remediation to the external wall system including balconies – that authority lies with the freeholder and the managing agent.

We'll invite you to a resident meeting in the coming weeks.

We have provided links to mental health resources which you may find helpful.

Members of our team are on-site again today to carry out further inspections and will be there over the next couple of days. Please notify us if you see any smoke/water damage, if you are having problems with your electrics or if you suspect anything else which has been caused by this incident. You can contact us on [customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk](mailto:customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk).

We are currently engaging with the Freeholder/managing Agent about the insurance position following this incident. We will write to you further once we have more information on the building's insurance policy.

If you did not return to your home last night because it was relatively late when the LFB said residents could return, please provide us with a receipt for the hotel you stayed in and send to the email address above.

### **Fire Risk Assessment**

Your building has an annual Fire Risk Assessment (FRA), carried out independently by Savills, which we publish on our website. It is valid only for floors 7-11 (and certain communal parts of the ground to 6<sup>th</sup> floors). It is not valid for the floor where the fire took place. The Fire Risk Assessment for those floors will be issued by the Managing Agent.

You can view the FRA on our website here: [https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/media/11960/uprn-houb0000\\_tyne-street\\_6\\_houblon-apartments-relay-building-701-1114\\_20210421142427.pdf](https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/media/11960/uprn-houb0000_tyne-street_6_houblon-apartments-relay-building-701-1114_20210421142427.pdf).

There are some actions on the FRA which are listed as 'outstanding'. At the time the report was published in April 2021, there were nine actions outstanding. Some of these have since been completed, some we are currently working on, and some are the responsibility of the Freeholder/Managing Agent. We are carefully monitoring our actions, progressing them as quickly as we can and liaising on an ongoing basis with the Freeholder/Managing Agent in relation to their actions. We will update you fully once we have further information.

### **Who owns the building and what is Network Homes responsible for?**

In buildings like this, there is a complex ownership structure in place which has an impact on the fire safety arrangements and who is legally responsible for them. Network Homes is not the Freeholder (building owner) – we are the 'head lessee' of the 70 flats.

The Freeholder, which owns the building, is responsible for implementing fire safety measures for the external wall system including balconies through their Managing Agent. Like any leaseholder, Network Homes is responsible for the fire safety measures of our internal areas and we have no legal authority over fire safety remediation for the external parts of the building.

### **Balcony remediation**

Since the Grenfell fire, Network Homes has been carrying out a programme of investigations and remediation work on the tall buildings we own. The Freeholder and Managing Agent are responsible for the investigation and remediation at the Crawford Building/Houblon Apartments.

In August 2020, we received an EWS1 form for our properties with an A3 rating (which means that external wall materials are deemed to be unlikely to support combustion, but there may be potential costs of remedial works to attachments – attachments refers to balconies in this instance). This included a recommendation by an independent fire engineer stating that remediation is required to the balconies to make sure they are compliant with current regulations updated since the Grenfell fire. Since then, we've been in dialogue with the Managing Agent and Freeholder about how they intend to remove and replace this material. We will ensure we get the latest position from the Managing Agent/Freeholder and will share it with you.

### **Resident meeting**

Once we've had a chance to speak to the fire brigade, managing agent and freeholder to raise any queries we have, we will organise a resident meeting with you. This may be with residents of all the properties in the building, including those not owned by Network Homes, or it may be just for our residents. We hope to hold this in the coming weeks so we can provide you with additional information to any questions you may have. We will keep you updated with the results of the LFB investigation into the cause of the fire.

### **Resident resources**

We know this has been a distressing incident for you. The End Our Cladding Scandal campaign group recommends housing associations share mental health resources with those affected by fire safety. If you are experiencing distress or worry from yesterday's incident, you can find some useful organisations on the End Our Cladding Scandal website: <https://endourcladdingscandal.org/get-support/>. We have also listed some organisations on our website: <https://www.networkhomes.org.uk/buildingsafetyresources/>.

The London Fire Brigade also offers a free online tool which guides you through a fire risk assessment of your home (home visits are available for more vulnerable residents): <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/home-fire-safety/>.

### **Letter regarding new fire safety framework**

You may have received a letter this week regarding a new fire safety framework that Network Homes has appointed a number of contractors to. This has no relation to the incident yesterday, but we recognise you may have some questions about this as it is also about fire safety.

While we are not responsible for the external wall system, we are responsible for the communal areas of floors 7-11. Our Fire Risk Assessment notes actions we need to carry out and these could possibly require a contractor to complete, depending on the nature of the action. Therefore we have sent you the information about the new fire safety framework as work could be carried out by those contractors to your communal area.

Please get in touch with us on [customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk](mailto:customerservice@networkhomes.org.uk) if you have any further questions.

Best wishes



Gerry Doherty  
Executive Director of Customer Service

## Timeline of events – 7 March 2022

- **16.13:** The London Fire Brigade (LFB) release statement on twitter saying they are dealing with a fire at Houblon.
- **16.49:** We first became aware of the fire and our Executive Leadership Team were informed.
- **By 18.00:** David Gooch (our Executive Director of Development) and Peter Benz (our Executive Director of Finance) were on site. They were joined later by Gerry Doherty, Foluke Ajayi (our Head of Neighbourhood), Des Woodcock (our Fire Safety Officer) and Colin Conboy (our Head of Health and Safety).
- **19.11:** LFB gave a verbal briefing to everyone in the reception centre.
- **From 19.20:** Network Homes team members helped residents during the evening.
- **19.20:** Gerry Doherty liaises with Paul Francis (Head of Insurance) and representative from private managing agents regarding alternative accommodation for residents.
- **19.45:** A Tower Hamlets Liaison Officer advised that residents in Houblon apartments may be allowed back in building. Further update to be given at 20.45.
- **19.45:** Foluke Ajayi and Colin Conboy undertake cross reference of residents attending reception centre with Network Homes records of residents. It was determined 35 Network Homes residents were in the reception centre.
- **21.00:** Tower Hamlets officer advises that LFB are going to undertake a check of each floor in Houblon apartments before confirming it is safe for residents to return home.
- **22.15:** LFB announce that Houblon Apartments is safe to return to. Several floors of the higher part of the building containing private residents are not allowed to return to the building. Residents start leaving reception centre to return to their homes.
- **22.30:** Network Homes sends text message to all its residents advising them building is safe to return to as not all residents were at reception centre to hear LFB. Network Homes team then left the site.
- **23.00:** Tower Hamlets Council arranges temporary hotel accommodation for three different households in Network Homes properties whose flats had suffered water damage.