

Sovereign Network Homes

Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy

May 2024

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Version details

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v.04	Amendments following internal consultation with members of Executive Leadership Team	April 2021
v.05	Review and update to current legislation and inclusion of management activity	March 2024

Introduction and objectives

This is Sovereign Network Homes (SNH) Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy. Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower a new regulatory regime has introduced for Higher Risk Residential Buildings, the principles within this strategy apply to any SNH buildings with potential safety issues.

The strategy is about how we will engage and communicate with residents about building safety for new and existing buildings. It should be considered the first steps in achieving meaningful engagement with residents about the safety of their homes. The key aims of this strategy are to:

- Ensure residents are empowered to play an effective role in ensuring their building is, and continues to be, safe;
- Set out the ways residents can get involved and the benefits to them from participating in engagement on building safety;
- Identify the building safety information residents wish to be provided with;
- Identify the way in which residents wish to be provided with building safety information;
- Establish how we can improve the way we engage with residents in relation to the safety of their home;
- Engage staff with regards to residents' rights to have a say in relation to their homes;
- Clarify our responsibilities and residents' responsibilities to ensure their homes remain safe.

The strategy will be reviewed as part of our preparations for the implementation of the Building Safety Act 2022, Higher Risk Building Regulations 2023 and as other changes of legislation or regulation come into place, and in response to priorities identified by the Building Safety Regulator.

Setting the scene

Following the tragedy at Grenfell in June 2017, the Government commissioned the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt. This report was published in May 2018. In December 2018 the Government accepted all 53 of the report's recommendations which resulted in the Fire Safety Act 2021, Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and Building Safety Act 2022 being introduced as legislation.

The legislation changed the landscape for managing high rise residential buildings and aims to provide the following:

- A clearer responsibility for those building or managing these buildings;
- A stronger voice in the system and better information for residents;
- A greater oversight by regulators; and
- A tougher enforcement when things go wrong.

We have established a Building Safety team that has been in place since 2019 as a direct

response to Grenfell whose aim is to investigate our buildings using a systematic risk based approach, implement interim fire safety measures where necessary and complete remediation where defects are found. This team works closely with DLUHC to access funding for remediation works and pursue developers for costs or responsibility for remediation works.

Our approach

This strategy explains how we will engage and involve residents in relation to fire safety remediation works, regardless of building height, and our strategic commitment to residents in relation occupied high rise residential building management. It doesn't include specific building safety information (such as information about cladding) about individual buildings. Alongside the strategy we will have bespoke plans tailored to individual properties where there is deemed to be a need. These plans will explain how the strategy will work in practice for these buildings.

We want to make sure it meets residents needs and requirements. It explains what residents can expect in terms of communication from us and how they can get involved and raise concerns.

There are two main strands to how we will engage with residents around building safety:

- Building safety remedial works (external wall remediation and associated works)
- High rise building management (day to day operations)

SNH recognises the requirement to consult residents living in our higher risk building portfolio. SNH will consult residents before undertaking intrusive investigations and major works to the building fabric, compartmentation or fire doors. There may be a need to undertake immediate remedial works in urgent circumstances which may not allow for consultation prior to completion. Items for consultation will include the following (where relevant):

- Notification of works and specification
- Pre-arranging appointments and access
- Highlighting areas of the building impacted
- Health & safety arrangements
- Interim safety measures
- Choice of colour/finish (where appropriate)

Consultation for remediation projects is carried out through a range of activities which include:

- Feedback surveys following remedial works
- Recording attendees at resident meetings and webinars
- Response rate to vulnerability surveys
- Feedback from complaints, surveys and residents meetings
- Access rates to properties for remedial works and compliance programmes

Information and understanding

Communication and engagement

We will use a range of ways to communicate with residents to cater for, as much as possible, the diverse needs of residents.

Examples of the way in which we can communicate with residents may include but is not limited to:

- At sign up
- New tenant visit
- Website
- Portal
- Notice boards/posters
- Webinars including Q&A
- App
- Text
- Email
- Letter
- Face to face and on-line resident's meetings
- Home visits
- Pop sessions to talk about building safety
- Video

If there are any significant changes to the strategy or action plan, we will update residents during their Residents Meetings on an annual basis (or more frequently if required) and via letter.

For residents at our Older Persons Schemes or for vulnerable residents we will provide an option to share building safety information with their relatives if they request us to.

Where we have identified a serious issue with a building affecting the safety of all residents, we will update residents regularly about any interim safety measures we have put in place, remedial works and further investigations that are required. These updates may be in the form of periodic meetings and/or updates on our website and/or quarterly newsletters.

As part of our operational building management we will ensure that every high rise residential building receives;

- An inspection by a competent person at least every two months, including inviting residents to attend the building inspection once a year.
- Building Safety Officers attending residents meetings every 6 months to discuss building safety management
- A letter communicating building specific building safety information annually
- A quarterly vulnerability survey
- A valid fire risk assessment
- Access to our customer service contact centre 24/7 who are trained to respond to

building safety related queries and concerns.

A fire action notice is installed within each building. These confirm whether the building has a stay put strategy in the event of a fire or an evacuation strategy. This is reviewed as part of the fire risk assessment and if issues with the building fire safety performance are identified.

We will encourage residents to get involved in making decisions relating to the safety of their building. If residents would like to get involved we welcome their input. Residents can contact our remediation team buildingsafetyteam@networkhomes.org.uk and our high rise building management team on firesafety@networkhomes.org.uk.

SNG recognises that the Building Safety Act 2022 and Higher Risk Building Regulations 2023 require the need to consult residents periodically on building safety related matters that affect their building. SNG is also obligated to inform residents following the completion of significant material alterations to their including which include the following:

- work which increases or decreases the external height or width of the building;
- work which changes the number of storeys the building has (including adding or removing a mezzanine or gallery floor);
- work which changes the number of residential units contained in the building;
- work which changes the number of, or width of, the staircases in the building or which changes the number of, or width of, any other escape routes within the building;
- work to the external wall of the building excluding work which consists only of materials of a description specified in regulation 7(3) of the Building Regulations 2010 becoming part of the wall;
- work which changes the internal layout of the building.
- we will also consult with residents on any major changes to this strategy and how the strategy fits into and/or changes the management of your building and its building safety requirements. The consultation period will be 3 weeks from the date the consultation letter was issued and we will confirm the 'end of consultation date' within. This is not to be confused with any other form of legislative consultation such as a Section 20 (Leasehold Consultation).

Clarity and accessibility of information

We will proactively provide all residents with the information they need to help them understand the protections, processes and systems that are in place to keep their building safe.

We will make sure the information provided is relevant and in a format that can be understood by residents. We aim to provide this information in different formats on request, for example, for residents who have a physical or visual impairment, have other disabilities or who do not speak English.

As standard practice for remediation projects we will provide:

- The measures we have in place to mitigate potential fire and building safety risks to residents,
e.g. fire precautions;
- Information for residents explaining how they can reduce the risk of fire in individual dwellings

e.g. by not storing flammable materials;

- A process for reporting a fire risk and/or raising any other safety concerns;
- Procedures to follow where a fire occurs in the building, including for evacuation;
- Regular updates on remediation projects.

Residents can ask for further and more detailed information about their building if they wish and such information may include (but is not limited to):

- Full, current and historical fire risk assessments;
- Outcome of building safety inspection checks where available, and any remedial works undertaken or planned;
- How assets in the building are managed, e.g. frequency of lift maintenance;
- Details of fire safety equipment in the building e.g. smoke alarms, sprinklers, etc.
- Passive fire protection measures in place, e.g. fire doors, etc.
- Information on the maintenance of fire safety systems including frequency of inspection and servicing?
- The fire strategy and other critical building information;
- Structural assessments, where available;
- A copy of the Building Safety Case report
- A copy of the building assessment certificate, where available;
- A copy of the building safety resident engagement strategy;
- A copy of the mandatory occurrence reporting procedure;
- A copy of the EWS1 and FRAEW.

We will put a process in place for dealing with requests for information. We will aim to provide residents with the documents they request within 1 month. Within this process we will provide guidelines to enable vulnerable residents to nominate an advocate, care-giver or representative who can request more detailed information on their behalf. Certain documents cannot be shared with residents if they contain sensitive information such as legal advice or commercial information.

Residents who have a concern about building safety can contact our Customer Services Team who will arrange for SNG to deal with this concerns. Any resident who is not happy with the outcome and wishes to escalate the issue can submit a complaint. All SNH staff can advise residents on the complaint procedure or a copy can be found on our website.

Residents living in our Older Persons Schemes who report repairs directly to their Scheme Manager can continue to report any building safety concerns directly to them.

How safety information should be provided when residents move in

At the start of every tenancy or lease we will clarify the fire strategy and critical building information specifically relating to the building they are occupying. We then send an annual communication to all residents reiterating this information. Of course, residents are encouraged to contact us sooner if they have any queries or concerns.

Residents' and landlords' responsibilities

Understanding our responsibilities

Building safety is something that all residents and landlords must work on together. Everyone in the building can have a positive impact on the safety of their household and neighbours, and it is all our responsibility to do what we can to keep the building and its occupants safe. That includes letting us know of any safety concerns residents may have, understanding building safety messaging and taking responsibility for the safety each home.

As a landlord we are responsible for undertaking different types of building safety inspections monthly, annually or bi-annually to ensure all statutory obligations are being met and the building is being managed effectively.

Compliance test	Frequency of servicing
Gas safety checks	Annual
Pressure System Safety Regulations	Annual
Grade A Fire alarms	Quarterly, weekly functional tests completed Twice a year
Grade D interlinked Fire alarms	Dependent on tenure of building, quarterly or twice a year
Automatic Opening Vents	Monthly
Dry/wet risers	6 monthly visual inspection and annual pressure test
Sprinkler	Annual
Emergency lighting	Monthly and annual (different tests undertaken)
Water mist systems	Twice a year
Fire extinguishers	Annual
Fusible links	Annual
Fire blankets	Annual
Fire Risk Assessments	Up to 3 years (dependent on perceived risk of the building)
Legionella Risk Assessments	Up to 5 years (dependent on perceived risk of the building)
Water hygiene monthly inspections (eg water outlet temperature)	Monthly
Water hygiene quarterly inspections (eg shower cleans)	Quarterly
Water hygiene annual inspections (eg tank inspections and cleans)	Annual
Pump servicing	Quarterly for foul system and 6 monthly for cold water supply systems
Communal asbestos surveys	No specified timescale
Renewable heating and hot water systems	Annual
Domestic electrical testing	5 yearly
Communal electrical testing	5 yearly
Portable appliance testing	Annual
Lightning protection	Annual
Passenger lift PPM	Monthly
Domestic lifting/mobility equipment	6 monthly
LOLER (Lifting Operations & Lifting Equipment Regulations) inspection	6 monthly
SAFed (Safety Assessment Federation) inspections (inspection of lifts)	Annual
Electronic gate servicing	Annual

Fall arrest system inspection	Annual
Additional fire safety aids such as vibrating plates, flashing beacons	Dependent on the equipment
Stand alone within sheltered housing properties	Annual

Residents must provide access to their home for us to inspect and carry out different types of safety inspections (such as fitting fire alarms) or undertake fire and structural safety-related maintenance. Where information or access is required from residents, we will give the resident reasonable notice. Where access is not provided we will have to take legal action. We will look to recover the costs of such legal action directly from the resident.

Due to the risk they may pose when evacuating in the event of a fire or other emergency, we have a zero-tolerance policy for residents leaving possessions in communal areas. Any items stored in communal areas may be removed and disposed of without notification to the residents concerned.

All residents living in specialist housing are required to have a Person Centred Risk Assessment (PCRA) completed. This is to assist SNG with supporting the resident with any fire risk or risk posed to their ability to respond to a fire situation. SNG has decided to replicate this assessment process to anyone else living in a building within scope who has been identified or who self-identified themselves with not being able to self-evacuate.

Should the need be identified following the PCRA, we will produce a PEEP (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) for the resident. A summary of the PEEP is held on site in a secure information box which the fire brigade has access to in case of an emergency.

Where vulnerabilities have been identified the information will be stored in a secure information box to assist the fire and rescue services with an evacuation.

Encouraging residents to keep their buildings safe

We will ensure that residents are empowered to play an effective role in making sure that their building is, and remains, safe. This includes identifying and reporting hazards that may impact on the safety of the building and meeting their responsibilities to ensure their own safety and that of their neighbours.

Residents should think about the needs of their household and any members of their family who may be vulnerable (such as young children or someone with a disability). They should ensure they understand the fire strategy for their building so they know what they should do in the event of an emergency.

Upon advice from the Fire Service, we no longer provide fire safety equipment (such as fire blankets and fire extinguishers) within either residents' homes or in communal areas. The Fire Service advise that unless individuals have the relevant training on the use of fire safety equipment then they are encouraged not to attempt to fight the fire. They should close all fire doors to contain the fire and follow the action plan for their building.

Residents are also encouraged to consider the wellbeing of their neighbours in the building and recognise that their actions may put the lives of others at risk. For example, residents should ensure they do not prop open any communal fire doors and they do not store items in the communal hallway which may impede an escape route in the event of an emergency. Residents must seek permission if they wish to make any changes to their fire doors. Residents who smoke should ensure they do so in a safe place and fully extinguish their cigarettes afterwards. Barbecues and patio heaters should never be used inside buildings, on balconies or in close proximity to any flammable material.

Where residents see one of their neighbours acting in a way that suggests they have not understood or remembered the building safety information they can remind them of it. An example of this could be neighbours who are suspected to be hoarding, who are storing items in the communal hallway or neighbours who may be considered vulnerable. If residents are not comfortable discussing this with their neighbours, they should report it in confidence as a building safety concern to us.

Buildings where SNH is not the Principal Accountable Person

Where SNH is classified as an Accountable Person not the Principal Accountable Person, SNH is not responsible for building safety remediation works.

Where SNH is an Accountable Person and responsible for managing individual dwellings and communal spaces within the building demise. SNH is responsible for resident engagement at these buildings and will undertake the same processes detailed above, in collaboration with the Principal Accountable Person.

Where SNH is a Responsible Person, the ownership for resident engagement falls to a third party acting as the Accountable Person, SNH will support the Accountable Person with communication and managing their resident engagement strategy.

Associated Policies

- Fire and Building Safety Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

Review

This strategy will be reviewed bi-annually.