

Name

Address,

Dear resident,

Re; Fire safety in your property

As a resident of a property in a tower block you were contacted last week by your housing team in light of the tragic events at the Grenfell Tower block in Kensington.

I am writing with some further information on your safety and the situation in Thurrock's high rise properties. You will also receive details of a meeting near your home which you can attend to discuss any concerns you may still have about your safety. These meetings will be led by elected Councillors as well as staff from the Council and from the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

Please see below some 'Frequently Asked Questions' with answers and further information.

1. **How many tower blocks does Thurrock Council have within its stock?**

Thurrock Council has 15 high rise tower blocks located in Chadwell St Mary, Grays and Tilbury. There are a total of 981 flats in all the properties. Most of the occupiers are Council tenants, with some leaseholders and a small number of people who are renting from leaseholders who have moved out since buying their properties.

2. **Are the properties managed by a company, like the Kensington and Chelsea Tenancy Management Organisation ?**

No. The properties are managed in-house by Council staff. Repairs and maintenance, as well as improvement programmes such as Transforming Homes, are delivered by private companies who are appointed through a procurement process.

3. **Does Thurrock Council implement the "Stay Put" policy for fire safety in tower blocks ?**

Yes. The Council works in partnership with the Essex Fire and Rescue Service and in accordance with their guidance the "Stay Put" policy is the safest procedure in the event of a fire in high rise accommodation.

The policy is based on people 'staying put' if they are not directly affected by a fire. This is to allow firefighters to carry out a safe evacuation if required.

Fire risk assessments undertaken on all Thurrock Council's housing stock are carried out in accordance with the Local Government Association's guidance document "*Fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats*" which confirms the use of the 'stay put' policy in high rise blocks.

4. Does the “Stay Put” policy mean that people shouldn’t leave the building if they are aware of the fire?

No. The policy involves the following approach.

- When a fire occurs within a flat, the occupants alert others in the flat, make their way out of the building and summon the fire and rescue service.
- If a fire starts in a communal area (hallways/stairwells etc.) , anyone in these areas makes their way out of the building and summons the fire and rescue service.
- All other residents not directly affected by the fire would be expected to ‘stay put’ and remain in their flat unless directed to leave by the fire and rescue service.

It does not mean that people who want to leave the building should not do so, or that people who have decided to leave should not tell their neighbours about a fire.

5. What fire detection systems do we have within our high rise blocks?

All fifteen tower blocks have a central fire alarm system which has two parts.

There are smoke detectors on each floor linked to the fire doors. If smoke is detected the doors close automatically to contain the fire on that floor until the fire service arrives.

The system is tested every day by housing staff to make sure that all the doors close as required. Any faults or damage identified are dealt with as a priority by the contractor, and fixed within 5 hours under the contract.

The second element is the heat detector and a sprinkler system that is located in the bin room on the ground floor, at the bottom of the main bin chute. In the event that the heat detector is triggered, the sprinkler system automatically operates to contain or put out the fire. The bin store rooms all have the necessary measures in place to contain a fire in that area.

The main bin chute running right up through the block also has fire-stopping measures on each floor – this is a system which triggers closing flaps above and below any fire that starts in the chute itself.

6. Are there sprinklers in the communal areas on every floor ?

No. In line with ‘Staying Put’ the Council applies an approach based on removing potential causes of a fire and minimising the need for alarms. Where a fire does occur, sprinklers can sometimes cause smoke to disperse more easily and increase the bad effects of a small fire.

7. Do the blocks have an audible fire alarm system in place?

No. This would also not be in line with the 'staying put' policy, which is based on fires being contained within the building by a system of 'fire breaks', i.e. barriers, including fire-proof doors, which work automatically to stop a fire spreading. This approach is also known as 'compartmentation'.

8. Are there fire alarms in the individual flats ?

Yes. Each flat has a heat detector in the kitchen and a smoke detector in the main hallway which are provided by the Council. Residents whose alarms are triggered by a fire in their property can escape safely, and can also notify other residents in the immediate area if necessary.

9. Do any of our tower blocks have an external cladding system in place?

Yes. Twelve of the fifteen high-rise tower blocks have an insulated cladding system installed over ten years ago.

The cladding that was used on the Grenfell Tower and that has been identified on a number of other high rise buildings across the UK is (ACM) Aluminium Composite Material. Also the insulation used on the Grenfell Tower was a ridged PIR (Polyisocyanurate) insulation board.

The cladding utilised on the tower blocks in Thurrock is a glass fibre reinforced polyester resin cladding system which is classified as class "0" for fire spread – the highest possible rating - and also classified as a "non-combustible" material. These details have been sent to the government, and they have not requested any material for testing (i.e. none of Thurrock's blocks is on the list of 600 which the government is investigating)

The insulation installed on the tower blocks in Thurrock is a fibre "Rockwool" product. So neither the cladding or the insulation used in Thurrock is of the type being urgently reviewed by the Government.

10. Was the work to the cladding panels in 2012 to the Grays and Blackshots tower blocks to do with insulation / fire improvements?

No. That work was not 're-cladding'. The work was to install fixings and make secure the original panels. This did not involve removing the old cladding panels or using any new cladding materials – so the works did not affect the safety rating of the blocks.

11. Is the Council taking any extra action to check that the cladding on its blocks is safe ?

We are commissioning an independent assessment of cladding systems that have been used on our twelve tower blocks. This will ensure that all fire stopping measures are in place and

meet legislative requirements. We have not been asked by the government to do this (or to send any samples from our buildings), but are doing it as an extra precaution.

12. What else is the Council doing to make sure the tower blocks are safe ?

We are working with the fire service to review all our fire risk assessments. Any necessary works will be given top priority. We are also reviewing car-parking arrangements on some estates to make sure the fire service can have access to the buildings if necessary.

If any more changes come about because of the fire in Kensington we will implement them quickly and keep you informed. Your safety is our number one concern.