

PE1719/F

Petitioner submission of 1 September 2019

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to respond to submissions to the Public Petitions Committee from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA); the National Council of Fire Chiefs (NFCC); Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS); the Scottish Government (SG) and the Council of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

I make the following observations as they relate directly to the petition. (References to submissions will include page number and paragraph number with the first full paragraph of any page counting as para 1).

1 The stay-put policy works well ... *provided its limitations are fully understood and there is the possibility of total evacuation* (Review Report, s34, SFHA, p 1, footer).

The petition relates specifically to evacuation and asks that a procedural step be added to the stay put policy whereby, on those very rare occasions that fire breaches compartmentation, tenants would be alerted immediately. This is because there is no mechanism in existing multi-storey buildings for alerting tenants to fire spreading other than knocking on individual doors, a time-consuming operation in buildings like Cartcraigs Road, for instance, which has 17 floors. It is argued, therefore, that in the event of fire spreading from the flat of origin, it would be better if tenants were alerted, however this is achieved, sooner rather than later and before smoke starts to permeate the building.

2 *In addition, compartmentation around escape routes and smoke control provisions in escape routes should ensure that if occupants wish to evacuate they should be able to do so in relatively smoke free conditions* (NFCC, p 1, para 8).

There are no 'smoke control provisions in escape routes' certainly not in Cartcraigs road.

3 *NFCC also recommends that there is increased communication with residents.... which includes the evacuation strategy* (NFCC, p 3, para 5).

There has never been any communication with tenants, certainly not Cartcraigs Road tenants, about evacuation strategy. Cartcraigs Road is comprised of 134 one-bedroom flats and houses a greater than average number of housebound, disabled and elderly tenants.

4 *Operational challenges may arise where an evacuation strategy other than stay put is introduced for high-rise single staircase residential buildings (NFCC, p 2, para 6).*

Cartcraigs Road has two staircases.

5 *New guidelines affect existing legislation relating to all new buildings and building work, including renovations and refurbishments (Review Report, s3, SFHA, p 1 footer).*

Cartcraigs Road, as stated, already has two stairways. The building is due to have cladding and windows replaced in the coming months. In response to an enquiry about whether this 'refurbishment' qualified the building for evacuation sound alerts (Review Report, Recommendation 5, SFHA, p 1, footer) Carolyn Lennon, Locality Housing Director, GHA wrote;

The new guidelines due to come into force in October apply in the main to new residential buildings above 18metres. There is no requirement to fit evacuation sounders retrospectively during projects where the scope of the work is limited to replacing wall insulation and windows. Therefore, based on the advice and guidance of the fire service, we don't at this stage plan to install evacuation alert systems at Cartcraigs or our other multi-storeys.

This seems to suggest the new guidelines could apply to the renovation or refurbishment of existing buildings; however, if changing the whole facade and appearance of the building does not constitute refurbishment then the meaning of 'refurbishment' needs clarification.

6 *The provision of information in relation to the stay put guidance is currently being considered through Scottish Government's Strengthening Fire Safety for High Rise Domestic Buildings Consultation on Guidance for those responsible for Fire Safety in High Rise Domestic Buildings and Information for people who live in High Rise Domestic Buildings (SFRS, p 3, para 2).*

This consultation does not refer to evacuation strategies for existing buildings

7 *NFCC is content for the stay put strategy to be reviewed but have identified the need for Government funded robust academic research, including practical exercises, into high-rise residential evacuation strategies and the supporting building fire safety features. This would ensure that revisions to current guidance would be based upon appropriate up to date information, robust data and evidence rather than just opinion.*

Until such 'robust academic research' takes place, i would argue on the grounds of equality and given the absence of smoke control provision, evacuation sound alerts or sprinklers (SFRS p 2, para 2) that existing buildings should have equivalent evacuation strategies such as the early alert system proposed and that this should be procedural rather than dependent on any on the spot assessment in and of unpredictable circumstances.

Rachel Gibson (on behalf of tenants, Cartcraigs Road, Glasgow)

NB. This is a copy of an article that appeared in the Manchester News on the day of the Grenfell fire that may explain my 'confusion' regarding Greater Manchester FRS policy.

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service's Assistant County Fire Officer and Director of Prevention and Protection, Geoff Harris, to-day issued a statement reassuring residents in Manchester following the London tower block fire.

"I want to re-assure people in Greater Manchester that incidents of this scale, involving people's homes, are extremely rare".

He added: "Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service works closely with local councils and housing providers to ensure all buildings are as safe from fire as possible, and that staff can advise residents about how to stay safe. We have assessed every high rise building in Greater Manchester and our officers and crews visit each one to make sure that they are familiar with the building in case they need to attend any fire or other incident that may happen there.

"We would urge everyone to ensure they have a working smoke alarm and if your smoke alarm sounds or if you become aware of a fire in another flat our advice is to 'get out, stay out and call us out'.

"If you have a specific concern or feel vulnerable please call our Control Centre on 0800 555 815 who will be able to provide advice or book you in for a Safe and Well Visit".