

East Studios
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1st September 2020

Dear Resident

Gainsborough Studios – East Studios – building safety work update no 2

We wrote to you in May 2020 about the planned programme of safety works at Gainsborough Studios.

Since then we have been updating the Gainsborough Studios web pages on our website with information as it becomes available to us here:

<https://www.shgroup.org.uk/your-home/repairs/gainsborough-studios/>

Some residents have raised important questions with us and we have done our best to answer to these questions in the FAQs section of the website here:

<https://www.shgroup.org.uk/your-home/repairs/gainsborough-studios/frequently-asked-questions/>.

If you have questions which we have not yet answered in the FAQs or directly please email us at GainsboroughStudios.Info@shgroup.org.uk .

We said we would keep you updated about what we are doing.

What's been happening?

Notwithstanding the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown, we have been working closely with managing agents IDM Property Management Ltd (IDM) and the local fire authority to understand the extent of the remedial works that need to be completed.

We have received a copy of the expert report on the external wall system from IDM which we have shared with you on the website here:

<https://www.shgroup.org.uk/your-home/repairs/gainsborough-studios/important-docs/>

This report says that it has been recommended that essential remedial work is needed to bring the exterior rendering and timber façade of the building into line with current safety standards. This includes replacing the render and timber facades of the building.

When is this work going to happen?

We are working with IDM to understand the intended programme of work and will share this with you when we know more. In the meantime, we wanted to share information about the interim building safety measures which are being put into place.

Interim additional building safety precautions

Following the expert report on the external wall system and discussions with the London Fire Brigade, IDM have agreed that it is the right thing to do to put additional interim fire safety measures in place until the remedial works to the render and timber facade are carried out. These interim measures comprise the fitting of heat detectors in key areas of the buildings.

Programme to install additional heat detectors

Working with the London Fire Brigade, IDM have agreed on the most appropriate solution for the Gainsborough Studios buildings which is to install heat detection devices inside flats as an additional interim precautionary safety measure.

We are told that these will only need to be installed in the rooms of the flats adjacent to the areas where external materials will be replaced – these are flats with balconies or with walls adjacent to the external render. These devices will be linked to the communal fire alarm system.

When are these devices going to be installed?

IDM have told us they expect the installation work at East Studios will take place from **21 September** and will be carried out by IDM's approved fire contractor *IQ Fire Solutions*. The contractor will be making contact with all relevant residents to book in a time to come and do the installation work. Please look out for communications from IQ Fire Solutions.

We have had assurance that the contractor will do everything possible to minimise any disruption to residents during the installation and will ensure that all the required protocols for Covid-19 social distancing will be followed.

What will this work cost?

We are informed by IDM that the total cost of this work for the homes that we are responsible for (that is East Block) is £16,900 + VAT.

We will need to recharge for these works through the service charge provisions where this applies to leaseholders. This is likely to mean approximately a £400 additional service charge for each leasehold home. If you are renting your home from us this is accounted for differently. We will follow up with the required process and notices under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. Look out for that notice coming out in the next week.

We understand that this will be unwelcome news for leaseholders but installing the heat detectors is the right thing to do. We will be talking to everyone about their individual circumstances so that we can support leaseholders as we move through the process. There will be payment options available so it is important that you let us know what your circumstances are so we can have a conversation with you about your individual situation and find the best way forward.

Next steps on the overall building safety programme

This update covers the interim building safety measures but there will be much more detail to share about the full remedial works programme as this moves forward.

We understand that the next steps recommended are that further checks are undertaken on the external render and timber facades to establish the more detailed specification for the remedial work. This will cover how the work should be done and what the proposed replacement materials will be etc.

These checks are underway and will be writing to you again once we know more.

Will Southern Housing Group leaseholders be charged for the cost of the building safety programme for East Studios?

The safety of our residents is our first priority. Southern Housing Group is a not-for-profit charitable housing association and is regulated by the government which sets rules about how we can spend our money.

The funding for the building safety programme for East Studios at Gainsborough Studios is under consideration and we are obliged by the rules governing our business to pursue all available funding avenues open to us. Our preferred option is, of course, to find a way that means that leaseholders do not have to carry the burden of these costs.

You may have heard that there is a new government fund designed to support leaseholders with the costs of building safety work to remove and replace non-ACM building materials. It does **not** cover the cost of the interim measures detailed earlier which is why we have been able to be clear that we need to recharge for those.

However, in respect of the overall remedial works costs we are working with the government to apply for that fund to cover the cost of this work for our residents. We will confirm more details with you when these are available to us.

We're hearing from some residents that they are frustrated by the lack of a clear answer on the funding point and they are asking us why can't we be more specific about the government funding position?

We recognise that it is frustrating and may be worrying, when we cannot give definitive answers to a question. We are sorry to be causing any more stress in an already stressful situation. We are being cautious with what we say about funding at the moment because until the government confirms to us that the costs are definitely covered by their fund it would be wrong of us to rule out the possibility of needing to go down another route for funding.

What we can say is that we are actively working with the government and doing everything needed to secure this funding. Going down a recharge route for leaseholders would be a last resort and we would only consider it if for some reason the government chose not to grant the funding. We are working hard to avoid having to put leaseholders in that position and as soon as we have some definite news on this point we will share this with you.

We also do need to be clear that safety is the first priority and as a matter of principle we would never let any questions about how work will be funded stand in the way of getting essential safety work done.

More information

We have set up a dedicated area of our website which will be updated regularly with information about the programme. You can find copies of our updates, including a copy of the latest expert report on the External Wall System and frequently asked questions here:

www.shgroup.org.uk/gainsboroughstudios

We will be updating this online information as we move forward so please check back regularly. Don't forget you can also email us any queries on GainsboroughStudios.Info@shgroup.org.uk

Meanwhile thank you for your patience since we first wrote to you in May. I am sorry that this has been such a long update but there has been an accumulation of information to share and much of it was waiting on other parties before we could share it – we are aiming to get much more frequent updates out to everyone in future. We will be working to keep any inconvenience to you to a minimum whilst the works proceed.

Yours sincerely

The Gainsborough Studios Team
Southern Housing Group

Need help?

We understand that this is a worrying time for residents and increasingly so with the Coronavirus pandemic response. If you are at all worried about anything in connection with this work, the wider programme of work or building safety, please get in contact – we are here to support you.

If you are concerned about paying your rent or service charge or have a change in circumstances, then please contact our Customer Accounts Team for help and advice on 01403 220440.

There is more information on our website here

<https://www.shgroup.org.uk/about-us/covid-19-coronavirus-updates/rent-accounts/>

Independent specialist advice available for all leaseholders

If you have any questions and would like to get some independent advice you can access specialist advice from the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) which is there to help you understand your rights.



The government has allocated additional funding to LEASE to provide independent, free, initial advice to leaseholders on building safety issues to ensure they are aware of their rights and have independent support to understand the terms of their leases. More information on LEASE, including how to contact them for advice, is available here: <https://www.lease-advice.org/>