

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Building and Fire Safety Procurement Strategy Focus Group

#### Workstream/Phase 1 – General Building and Fire Safety works

#### How will the Group ensure urgent work is carried out as part of the Strategy?

Where urgent fire risks are found, works will be carried out under dispensation. This means to avoid delay works are arranged and paperwork is provided to residents after the urgent work has taken place.

We will need contractors that carry out urgent work and contractors to work on our longer term planned works. Under Section 20, where there are leaseholders in blocks, they will need to be consulted on the costs (tenders/bids).

The contracts can take several months to procure (arrange) as we need to undertake leaseholder consultation.

The process must be conducted in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015

It will be a single stage procurement process (Open Procedure) which is the quickest way to procure a public contract.

We undertook a test of the contractor market for procurement. We found that there is unlikely to be large amount of tenders (bidders)– potentially up to only 10 contractors may apply.

For some works, we see the value in not requiring a single contractor to oversee all programmed works in a region – for example, fire alarm works could be undertaken by a smaller company.

Workstream 1 focuses on blocks classed by guidance as ‘High Rise’ buildings in the first instance.

These Workstreams/phases will merge together at times to ensure works identified by FRAs or visits to buildings are prioritised. This may mean a smaller block needing works before a High Rise, for example.

When a section 20 consultation is required with leaseholders, the customer involvement Tpas trained procurement residents may get involved to provide feedback based on their training, particularly if they live in the blocks where works are required.

From July/August 2021 contractors will be asked to make tenders/bids for works. Residents will be involved in some of the questions the contractors have been asked to respond to.

#### How can residents be sure that the decisions made by Southern Housing Group, are the correct decisions?

The surveys will identify what works are required. Southern Housing Group is committed moving forward to ensure works to be undertaken are communicated with and explained to residents.

There may be the need for urgent works with a limited notice period available. It is important these works are undertaken.

We are listening and acting upon the latest legislation and we will communicate why decisions have been made moving forward.

We would like to apologise for residents not receiving this level of communication previously.

**There are contractors currently undertaking similar works to blocks – how were these contractors chosen and will the likely be putting in tenders (bids) for future work under this Procurement Strategy?**

Current contractors can bid for works as part of an open process. All contractors will need to be qualified under UKAS and have the correct accreditations (industry recognised certificates) in place.

## **Workstream 2 – Electrical & Fire Alarm Works**

**How often should electrical fire alarms be checked and should there be a sticker on the alarm to inform residents of when a) they were last checked and b) when they should be replaced?**

Southern Housing Group is ensuring a programme of testing is undertaken to form a database of every property. The Group is working with contractors for gas safety checks (as an example) to check and list the alarms while in a residents' property. Alarms will usually give a beep when needing attention and are usually provided with a battery as an electrical back up.

This work is being undertaken by the Group's Customer Safety Team.

One resident reported that a marker had been placed inside the alarm casing with the date the alarm is due to be replaced.

The Group is aware that communication can be improved both internally and to residents. Teams within the Group are working together to understand the best way to undertake these improvements and share information with each other. This in turn will enable teams to communicate effectively with residents.

**What is the Group's position with installing Carbon Monoxide detectors in resident's homes?**

The Customer Safety Team is exploring a data system to include Carbon Monoxide detectors.

The Group is also aware of changes to the Governments legislation regarding changes from Gas to electric in residents' homes.

The Customer Involvement Team informed the focus group that they are going to be working with a Sustainability Project Team within the Group to involve residents in the strategy concerning the Governments' legislation.

**In our communal areas, alarms are set off by residents committing anti-social behaviour. What can be done about residents smoking in communal areas?**

The Fire Safety team are in the process of visiting areas where this problem has been identified, to provide letters to all residents reminding them of fire safety. We are aware that some residents may

breathe smoke into lifts or breathe smoke near to detectors. If a repeat offender is known to residents, please let the Group know.

Some blocks have a ventilation system in the communal areas that automatically open windows. In smaller blocks, the fire team will open windows on arrival.

### Do lifts have fire sensors and how do lifts respond in the event of a fire?

The shaft in which a lift sits recognises if there is a fire/smoke. A lift in a situation of a fire operates in two ways: 1) It will automatically return to the ground floor, 2) The Fire Brigade will use a manual control.

## Workstream 3 – Sprinkler and Fire Suppression Systems

### How is advice determined by the Group for residents that need to ‘stay put’ in their flats and residents that need to follow a policy to leave the building?

Housing Associations follow guidance as to what is best practice based on the building design. Where blocks of flats are built with ‘compartments’ it can be safer to have a ‘stay put’ policy instead of responding to a fire alarm in the communal area and everyone leaving the safety of their flat, not knowing where the fire has taken place.

Further feedback about the ‘stay put’ and leave’ policy was provided during July’s Multi-Storey Living Panel. The notes from this meeting can be read here: [Specialist Advisory Panels \(shgroup.org.uk\)](https://www.shgroup.org.uk/specialist-advisory-panels)

## Workstream 4 – Multi-disciplinary Construction Consultancy Services

### How are decisions being made on the safety of cladding?

Decisions are made on a risk-based approach. Works are scheduled based on the risk(s) identified.

Fire risk assessments identify any risk for each block. If the fire risk assessor identifies an urgent risk, the team will then assess the priority of the block.

The programmes are continually reviewed to take into consideration building safety guidance as it is updated.

Consultants will be supporting the Group in making decisions on cladding safety. Some replacements will be subject to local authority planning requirements and costs for works will need to be discussed. Where there are home owners, these residents will need to be consulted with regarding costs.

Some work is already underway.

There is a government scheme for some cladding. This is called the Building Safety Fund and is for unsafe cladding on residential buildings that are 18 meters and over, that do not comply with building regulations.

The Group is reviewing the new guidance provided following the government’s announcement on funding to replace cladding.

## Workstream 5 – MEP Engineering Services

### What does MEP stand for?

Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing.

### Communication

### Why do contractors take up turning spaces by flats left for emergency vehicles?

Contractors are aware that they should not use these areas for settling down their vehicles when attending to undertake works. The example provided by a resident was followed up and the incident was discussed with the contractor.

The Project Team informed the Focus Group what the process was for making decisions about space needed for works.

The Group work together with the Fire Brigade to understand where space outside of a building can be used to store work material during the length of a project.

Assessments are undertaken for projects to look at how long works will be required and what vehicles need access. Advice is given to avoid using residents' car parking spaces. Where grass areas for storage of work materials or places for parking are required, we will ensure this is communicated with residents moving forward as part of our commitment.

### Fire doors in blocks have had works carried out over recent months. Residents received no prior warning of this work being carried out – why?

Some essential fire safety works may last for one day only. All contractors should have identification for the company they work for on behalf of the Group.

Where works may take longer, it is our intention to inform residents.

### What communication support will be there for residents – especially for vulnerable residents?

The Customer Involvement Team is working with Fire Safety and Building Safety to form a strategy which will include a focus on communication. The strategy will follow the guidance of the White Paper and the forthcoming Building Safety Bill.

The Fire Safety and Building Safety teams will continue to work together with existing services such as Housing, Sheltered and the Service Centre. The strategy will help identify how to improve communication.

We are investigating ways of how information can be shared with approved organisations such as the Fire Brigade. No personal details would be disclosed.

This will be reevaluated following the works on high rise.

The sharing of information with the Fire Brigade may also involve digital access to information for the block they will be attending and drawings of the layout of buildings.

## Costs

I am a shared owner, if there are works required where residents need to stay away from the property, how are these risks evaluated and would there be a cost to shared owners?

In extreme cases there may be a need for residents to stay away from a block where they live while works are taking place. We have one project at the moment where residents are being decanted over a period of time to enable the works to be undertaken.

In these situations, information is shared with residents to ensure the works are discussed and everyone's needs are understood.

A temporary move from home may not be required by residents for general works to a building.

In terms of costs to home owners, this is something that would need to be looked into and consulted on a case-by-case basis.

## Getting Involved – pre-procurement

### Review of current process

Residents will have opportunities to review current processes of services. This will assist the Project Team in forming the tender (bid) document sections regarding their commitment to engage with residents.

As legislation changes, to enable the Project Team to act quickly, some pre-procurement involvement opportunities may be advertised at short notice – normally with a minimum of 2 week's notice. These opportunities will normally take place by online focus group.

Where possible, longer notice periods will be provided, together with different methods of involvement being available – such as surveys, focus groups, responses by email and telephone call discussions.

### Recruiting contractors

Residents interested in contract reviews, procurement, residents interested in the Estate Inspector role and residents who have attended the Strategy focus group will be invited to review tenders (bids).

Where consultations focus on a particular block or area, residents not currently 'involved' with the Customer Involvement Team, will be invited to provide feedback.

We will also contact Resident Groups related to the project.

## Getting Involved – post procurement

### Scoring of tenders and interviews

12 residents attended 4, 3-hour training procurement training sessions run by Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service).

The 12 residents interested in FRA Procurement tender (bid) involvement, will be invited to online Fire Safety Training presented using Zoom.

Up to 2 residents out of the 12 trained procurement residents will take part in the tender (bid) evaluation (scoring) process for each separate tender (bid) exercise arranged under the strategy.

Due to the work involved and the timeframe, each separate tender (bid) exercise will be offered to the 12 trained residents and not to the same 2 residents. The 2 successful residents will take part in the complete tender exercise they have applied to be involved with.

This means that the 2 successful residents will also be part of the interview panel should interviewing of contractors be necessary.

The Project Team (including the consultant) will 'weight' each set of questions, so that the score for each response is 'weighted' against the other responses. Tenders (bids) are scored individually and then collectively discussed. Reasons are required to be given for the scores. A summary of the reasons are shared with the successful/unsuccessful contractors.

'Weight' and 'weighting' is where the importance of the answer to a question is given a percentage depending on how important the response will be in comparison to answers to other questions.

Similarly, 'weighting' is given to the importance of costs for works against the answers to quality of service questions.

The contractors making tenders (bids) are provided with a document detailing the weighting and background to each of the questions asked of them.

The 'weighting' for interview responses is also provided to contractors. Should the scoring process identify clear winning tenders (bids), interviews will not be necessary.

Where a section 20 leaseholder consultation is undertaken, Tpas (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) trained procurement residents may get involved to give feedback, particularly if they live in the block where the section 20 consultation is taking place.

## Monitoring the standards of contracts

Residents will be invited to get involved in the monitoring of contracts awarded.