

Frequently Asked Questions

Building and Fire Safety Involvement Strategy

My block is not a High Rise, why have I received a Section letter?

Under the new RICS guidance (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors), the Group should complete EWS1 surveys for all buildings of five or six storeys and below if:

There is cladding covering over 25% of the building,

If there is a ACM, MCM or HPL cladding present

Or if the balconies have combustible materials on them *and* they are linked to other balconies.

We have an ongoing Building Safety Programme in place to check our buildings and carry out any work required to ensure that our buildings comply with the government guidance

How are costs evaluated under legislation?

The Group is legally required to complete a Section 20 consultation when services proposed under a long-term agreement or works cost any resident more than £250. The consultation process requires the Group to provide residents with a set of documents (called 'Notices') that give further detail about the work or contract.

The Notice of Intention (NOI) is the first notice in the sequence and gives residents the opportunity to make observations before a set deadline, which is usually 4-6 weeks from the notice being issued. Once this deadline has passed, the Group will respond to the observations raised, and then begin a tendered process either through a framework or third-party accredited company(s).

A Notice of Estimate (NOE) is the second notice served and provides customers with detail of estimated contributions and provides further opportunity to send in observations. Again, residents would be given time to respond to the details of the notice, and the Group would respond to these.

In the event the Group decided not to go with the cheapest quote, a Notice of Reasoning (NOR) would also be sent to explain our reasoning for this.

In some circumstances, where we believe the works are Urgent and need to be completed immediately, the Group may commence works and then consult with residents afterwards.

All these works will be carried out in conjunction with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (2005). The Building and Fire Safety team is committed to identifying when this process does not work and have asked residents to provide specific examples to help us to identify what went wrong.

How will you consult with and assist residents who live in blocks below 18m during major works?

We will look at using multiple platforms to consult with residents during programme of major works. Examples of this will be microsites on the Group's website and a customer portal.

The first point of contact for residents living in building below 18m during work programmes will be your Home Services Manager/Scheme Manager.

The Building Safety Team will be delivering Building and Fire Safety training to customer facing teams to ensure they are able to support and assist residents with building safety related queries.

The Contracts Team within Building Safety is responsible for delivering programmes of Fire Safety works. Details for the Project Manager leading on any programme of works will be provided to all residents prior to works commencing.

Southern Housing Group also has a dedicated Senior Communications Manager within the Building Safety Team, who is responsible for working with residents to ensure that they all have the information that they need in a format that suits them.

Where buildings are not considered to be 'High Rise,' will every scheme across the stock be checked?

We are looking at fire protection across Southern Housing Groups' stock of properties. If something needs to be looked at, it will be.

The current legislation is changing and The Group is planning to prioritise according to a risk-based approach.

Once Workstream 1 is up and running, we can start the other workstreams as quickly as possible.

We have provided below an overview of the different types of Fire Risk Assessment methods that may be used:

TYPE 1 FRA - Non-intrusive (visual) assessment of the common parts of a building

TYPE 2 FRA – Intrusive inspection of the common parts of a building

(A more detailed survey where further investigation is required in the communal area after the Type 1 inspection)

TYPE 3 FRA - Non-intrusive inspection of the common parts of a building and the flats

TYPE 4 FRA - Intrusive inspection of the common parts of a building and the flats

This information can be found on the Building Safety page of the Groups' website:

[Building safety and government advice \(shgroup.org.uk\)](https://shgroup.org.uk)

How will residents be notified when updates have been made to Building and Fire Safety webpage?

We have procedures in place to manage updates for the Type 4 FRA and EWS1 surveys.

Microsites are currently used where major works are required. Microsites are parts of the Southern Housing Group website which are dedicated to specific building and developments to provide residents with their own communication strategy, and access to important information and documents.

Auto alerts are currently disabled due to limitations in the way low level updates are can be restricted. The team is looking at alternative ways to provide alerts for relevant updates, including the possibility of utilising SMS text alerts.

A recommendation to create an engagement platform to help support interaction with teams is currently being explored by the Customer Involvement Team, the IT Project Team and the Wider Group.

Noticeboards contain too much information and are not kept up to date.

We are working with the Estate Care teams and Home Services Managers/Scheme Managers to provide training and advise on what information should be stored on communal noticeboards.

Who has ultimate responsibility for decisions about fire safety costs Homeowners are responsible for?

Our policies have been drafted in line with current legalisation and are approved at Board Level, this includes our Procurement Policy and Section 20 policy.

What actions are being taken to seek costs from the original Housebuilders or other third parties when remedial works are required?

As part of any investigation the Group will always review the potential to claim these costs from the original housebuilder or other third parties. Where this option is available to us, we will always exhaust these possibilities before passing costs onto residents.

We are making applications to the government's Building Safety Fund for all eligible buildings. This fund is intended to cover the costs of works related to the remediation of unsafe non-ACM cladding systems on residential buildings of 18 meters or over.

Why have there been long delays in response times to Building Safety enquiries, what has led to residents having negative experiences?

The Group is currently experiencing high volumes of Building Safety enquiries, and this is a sector wide issue.

The Building and Fire Safety Team has been working on ways to improve the communication with residents based on the type of enquiry and the urgency of enquiry being received.

We have increased the size of our Building Safety team to manage the volume of planned works.

Four email addresses to help triage the enquiries to the right team have now been identified. The following three email addresses can be used by residents now:

Fire Risk Assessment queries: FireRisk.Assessment@shgroup.org.uk

Cladding queries: EWS.claddingsafety@shgroup.org.uk

Section 20 queries: BuildingSafety.S20@shgroup.org.uk

A further email address has been developed for Phase 2 enquiries - properties not regarded as high rises under the current legislation. This email address will be provided to residents when Phase 2 works are being undertaken at their location.

We are working with the Service Centre to ensure resident enquiries are forwarded to the right email address or directed to the correct team.

Why can I not speak directly with the Building Fire Safety Team?

We are reviewing the way resident communication is managed through the Building Safety team and future plans will improve response times and increase the opportunity for direct resident contact.

What is the expected response time for Building Safety enquiries?

Enquiries sent to the Fire Risk Assessment team will receive an initial reply from the team within 48 hours. Enquiries that require detailed response may be replied to within 15 days to enable information to be gathered.

Can the team use Basic English terminology when communicating with residents?

The content included in a majority of legal notices is based on legislation which includes required legal wording.

All documents provided to residents by the Building and Fire Safety Team are reviewed by the Senior Building Safety Communications Manager prior to circulation.

As part of our Strategy we will review feedback to identify the ways we can support understanding and improve the accessibility of our communications. An example providing a glossary of most commonly used terms to simplify 'jargon'.

What is your plan for EWS1 forms to help residents who may wish to sell their properties?

Further information regarding EWS1 forms and Leaseholders who may want to sell, re-mortgage or staircase can be found on the Building Safety Teams webpage at:

<https://www.shgroup.org.uk/your-home/building-safety-and-government-advice/leaseholders-who-want-to-sell-re-mortgage-or-staircase/>

How are we responding to queries from vulnerable residents'?

As part of the team's project works, we will establish procedures to ensure information is provided in a clear and accessible format.

We will also review resident data to help us identify vulnerable/at risk residents. This will enable us to tailor communicate with all residents as required and in line with any stated preference.

We will adhere to our Reasonable Adjustment policy to ensure reasonable adjustments are made when required.

Our communal areas are managed by an External Managing Agent. Who is responsible for fire safety?

If your block has an External Managing agent it is likely there will be split responsibility in terms of repairs, maintenance and servicing for fire safety responsibility. This will be dependant on whether the EMA has full or part management responsibility for the block.

Please contact us if you require further information regarding block specific responsibilities.

How will the role of the Resident Representative work with TRAs? What will be involved in the selection process?

This role is a suggested position within the governments' legislation as part of the Golden Thread to support transparency from the initial design and build stage through to the management of a property and residents moving in.

As part of the involvement strategy the Building and Fire Safety Teams will discuss the selection process and how the role will link in with local TRAs.

How will the Multi-Storey Living Panel work?

The Panel will meet on a quarterly basis online and the agenda will be resident-led wherever possible. Some Panel meetings may not contain Building Safety agenda items.

All outcomes to Panel meetings can be found here: [Specialist Advisory Panels \(shgroup.org.uk\)](https://www.shgroup.org.uk/specialist-advisory-panels/)

Key messages from agenda discussion will be shared within the Group in the form of a recommendation plan and with the Resident Scrutiny Group.