CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 001263
Date 26 June 2017

Tower Blocks

Request:

Kensington tower block fire -

Does your website, and all your literature, feature a highly visible reminder to people that the single most effective way of saving lives is to check their smoke, and carbon monoxide, alarms as often as possible, and keep spare batteries handy - at home, at work and at school / college?

Have all your residents been sent a message along the lines of -

"Have you checked your smoke alarm? Have you checked your carbon monoxide alarm? What is your fire escape plan eg if the fire is on the stairs? Have you checked your fire extinguisher(s)? A fire extinguisher can only handle a fire < 6 feet high."

The occupants of ALL HMOs must be thoroughly taught fire prevention, fire fighting, escape plans, first aid etc, in advance of the immediate fitting of sprinklers.

All HMOs, of all sizes, both public and private, across the country, and the world, need to be inspected without delay for -

similar use of faulty (eg flammable or toxic gas emitting) materials, or design flaws,

lack of sprinklers,

lack of central (and properly audible) mains-wired smoke detectors (connected to the nearest fire brigade control room so as to identify the floor with the fire), and fire alarms, in all public areas, and further mains wired detector / alarms in every flat,

lack of exhaustive escape plans covering all possibilities.

- The results must be made available on the website, and in the offices, of each local authority and of DCLG.

If fire hoses wont reach above a certain height, what is the solution? fire hydrants on the upper storeys of tall buildings? use of forest fire water bombers? forest fire helicopters fitted with water cannon?

Are the inflatable landing cushions automatically taken to high-rise fires for people to jump onto if needed?

Has any thought been given to rescuing people from a roof by helicopter?

In the event of a fire in the stairwell, what other methods of escape are there? - some kind of geared harness-on-a-rope lowering system?

If the cladding turns out to be flammable, how many other insulating etc materials are also? where else are they used? in the walls? in the ceilings? air-ducts? lift shafts?

Likewise with materials that give off toxic fumes when heated.

Did the air gap between the cladding and the insulation serve to accelerate the fire? by channeling the heat? assisted by the wind and atmospheric conditions?

Is there any good reason for this air gap?

Filling this air gap with non-flammable foam will cure both problems? is cavity wall insulating foam non-flammable?

How did an external fire penetrate the building? through heating flues? air ducts? open windows? closed windows? are u-pvc window-frames flammable?

Rydon, the firm that carried out the refurbishment work, has dropped the claim that it had met all “fire regulation, and health and safety standards” from its latest statement - why?

Lakanal House, 2009 - "years of botched renovations had removed fire-stopping material between flats and communal corridors" - in how many other buildings has this occurred?

£8.6 million on the "refit", plus the cost of replacing the building and its contents, and the compensation for the deaths, plus £1 million raised for those affected, plus £5 million from the government, would have paid for sprinklers how many times over?

What are the names of the various bodies / organisations that ignored the worries of the residents?

All the recommendations from after the 2009 Lakanal House (and all other such) tragedies will now be implemented immediately?

Rather than wait x years for the public inquiry / inquest (which will need to be full strength, as in the 2005 act) to state the bloody obvious, ensure all the precautions it is bound to recommend are enacted NOW. Leave the inquiry / inquest to decide who to level the corporate manslaughter charges against.

Any necessary legislation needs to be introduced on an emergency basis, and to cover both public and private landlords, and buildings of all sizes and uses.

eg building regulations prohibiting the use of all flammable or toxic fume emitting materials, and any other sub-standard equipment or practices eg "cheap" electrical equipment more likely to cause a fire, or "better value" gas fittings more likely to produce carbon monoxide.

- in any home, workplace, school, hospital, vehicle etc

Also an act requiring that all recommendations from inquiries and inquests be automatically enacted.

Studying the standards set by the germans would be intelligent.

"fire alarms within flats had not been set off by the blaze" - this is a good sign; the smoke failed to penetrate the doors.

Over-reaction - was it actually necessary to evacuate other buildings and close roads? or is this just typical of the authorities trying to be seen to act, when actually it only serves to cause more disruption? Was it really necessary to close London bridge station recently?

All this new round of problems is also managing to obscure the unanswered questions from the previous disasters -

Westminster / London bridge and Finsbury Park van killings - where did the (sad loser, mentally defective) perpetrators get the idea? - from all the media coverage of the Nice, Berlin and Stockholm lorry attacks.

Manchester bombing - how did the freak get a bomb into the arena (during a "severe" threat level)?

What plans are there to train many more sniffer dogs and deploy them in all public places?

In response to your request we can answer the following:

With respect to,
'Does your website, and all your literature, feature a highly visible reminder to people that the single most effective way of saving lives is to check their smoke, and carbon monoxide alarms as often as possible, and keep spare batteries handy – at home, at work and at school/college?'

Once the Private Sector Housing Team have inspected a property, a letter is written to landlords (tenants also sent a copy), which includes the reminder to landlords of the necessity to legally supply smoke alarms on each floor containing a habitable room. We also have access to leaflets provided by West Midlands Fire Service on

arranging home fire safety risk assessment checks through them, which we give tenants.

We also operate a rent with confidence scheme which encourages the installation of carbon monoxide detectors.

On our website we have:

- Becoming a tenant advice, which specifically says ‘when choosing a rented property ask yourself the following questions – Are there smoke detectors in place and in working order’?
- A link to RoSPA gas safety advice and information.

With respect to,
‘Have you checked your smoke alarm? Have you checked your carbon monoxide alarm? What is your fire escape plan eg if the fire is on the stairs? Have you checked your fire extinguisher(s)? A fire extinguisher can only handle a fire< 6 feet high

West Midlands Fire Service have clearly visible reminders on their main screen web page labelled fire safety in the home, with the following headings:

Smoke alarms
Advice on testing them regularly and necessity to replace batteries

Escape plan
Lists instructions on how to escape in the event of a fire and also an escape plan video.

Bedtime checks
Advice on checking for fire hazards before bed.

Carbon monoxide
Lists the dangers of CO and advice on buying a monitor including a CO leaflet and links to CO safety and gas safe websites.

Via the WMFS website, there is also a link to the HOMESTAMP web page, of which we are a member, which gives advice on fire safety in rented and high rise accommodation.