



EDINBURGH TENANTS  
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

## Strengthening Fire Safety for High Rise Domestic Buildings

### ETF Response – July 2019

#### 1.0 Background

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is a charity and the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation. ETF held a focus group for members to find out their views on Strengthening Fire Safety for High Rise Domestic Buildings. This response represents the ETF members' views on the questions most relevant to attendees at the event and has been shared with the Federation's Executive Committee.

ETF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper. The tragic events from the Grenfell Tower fire in London just over two years ago are still fresh in everyone's minds. Therefore it is essential that the occupants living in high rise domestic buildings feel safe and there are action plans in place to deal with a fire. ETF would like to praise the rapid response that the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) made in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. This included talking to and reassuring tenants and carrying out urgent repairs to ensure none of the high rise buildings in Edinburgh had the same material which was used in Grenfell.

#### 2.0 Part 1 – Fire safety information for people who live in high rise domestic buildings

##### 2.1 Please indicate from 1 to 5 what would be your most and least preferred way to get fire safety information (1 most preferred – 5 least preferred):

- Printed leaflet;
- Written information on a website;
- Video animation on a website;
- Notice Board/poster in the building;
- Mobile device app;
- Other.

The group felt that each of the methods were effective in many ways and would suit different audiences. However the following were rated as the most preferred (1):

- Printed leaflet by post - the group felt that the leaflet could possibly be combined with the rent statement. The leaflet should be made available in different languages for people whose first language is not English and in braille for people who are visually impaired;

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- Notice Board/posters in the building - the posters should be made available on each landing and not just the foyer of the building;
- Video animation on a website - for example, in Community Centres, Libraries, Housing Area Offices, Doctor's Surgeries and Shopping Centres.

The group felt that there were other effective methods to get fire safety information and this included:

- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) home fire safety visits;
- Printed information from owner/landlord when the occupant is first moving in to the property;
- Via local residents' group meetings. The group felt that a resident's group meeting could be combined with a visit from SFRS. ETF holds regular High Flats and Federation Meetings and these were viewed as good methods for SFRS to provide information;
- Large fridge magnets containing useful contact details;
- Email - although this was viewed as an effective method, it is important to note that not everyone has access to emails.

## **2.2 Does the fire safety information provide good advice on how to stop fires from happening?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- The information contains good advice, it is written in plain English and is easy to understand;
- Information should be included to warn against charging electrical appliances such as phones overnight as this is a common cause of fires;
- Information should be included to warn against throwing items such as cigarette ends down the bin chutes as this could cause a fire;
- Information should be included to warn against keeping Christmas lights on in properties when the occupant is asleep or out of the property. This is also a common cause of fires;
- Heat alarms should not be installed in the Kitchen as they will go off all the time.

## **2.3 Does the fire safety information provide good advice on what to do if a fire starts?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- The information states that you should not put yourself at risk and do not return to the flat until it is safe to do so. This is very important and the group agree with this statement;
- The information states that you should not leave your home if there is a fire elsewhere in the building, but if in doubt get out. The group found this statement quite confusing and contradictory;

- The information needs to take into account occupants who are elderly, disabled or have mobility issues, what they need to do in the event of a fire and what support is available to them;
- The information needs to put greater emphasis on, '*if in doubt get out*' more. The obvious example being the Grenfell Tower fire;
- The information needs to put greater emphasis on not using lifts in the event of a fire.

#### **2.4 Does the fire safety information help you to understand the reasons behind fire safety advice?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group were satisfied with the information provided and could not think of anything else to add.

#### **2.5 Is the fire safety information easy to understand?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- The information is written in plain English and is easy to understand;
- There could be more visuals and pictures to make the information stand out;
- There needs to be better use of the highlighting of some information;
- The information should be made available in different languages for people whose first language is not English and in braille for people who are visually impaired);
- There should be contact details for SFRS and relevant housing staff.

#### **2.6 Does your high rise domestic building have a way people can raise concerns about fire safety?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

As the members of the Focus Group live in different high rise flats in Edinburgh, there was an inconsistent approach, as some believed their building did have a way for occupants to raise concerns and others stated that their building did not.

#### **2.7 Does the process work?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Members of the Focus Group who believe their building has a way for occupants to raise concerns about fire safety and that the process works gave the following reasons for their answer:

- There are notices all over the building, which include contact details for the Concierge and housing staff;
- The Concierge service is advertised as being available for 24 hours, however in some buildings they are turned over to other Concierge offices after 18 hours and are being monitored. This needs to be made clearer to occupants;
- Resources are likely to be stretched, particularly at the weekends, when there is a greater likelihood of incidents that could result in fires.

## **2.8 Please let us know if you think there is any other useful fire safety advice and information that could be included for people who live in high rise domestic buildings?**

The group felt that there could be a screen in lifts which could give fire safety advice and information.

## **2.9 Do you think more information on the ‘stay put’ policy would be helpful?**

*The “Stay Put” strategy is normally used in high rise domestic buildings. It means when a fire occurs inside a flat, the occupants of the flat need to escape. People can safely remain in other flats unless directly affected by heat and smoke or directed to leave by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. This does not prevent occupiers, who are aware of a fire in the building but not affected directly by it, from deciding to evacuate.*

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- The information needs to emphasise more that if the occupants want to leave the building then they should, ‘*if in doubt get out*’;
- There should be more information for the elderly, disabled or occupants with mobility issues, how they should exit the building safely and what support is available to them. For example, ‘there is a small step down when occupants are exiting through the fire doors’. There should be a sign warning about this as it has affected a number of tenants living in one of the high rise buildings in Edinburgh;
- The information needs to emphasise that the safety of the occupants is paramount.

## **3.0 Part 2 – Fire safety campaign regarding common areas**

### **3.1 Would having clearer information on the dangers of leaving items that will burn in common areas encourage people not to do this?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- There should hard hitting visuals/pictures, for example a before/after picture which details the danger of leaving items that will burn in common areas;
- There should be information in bin chute rooms and on fire doors;
- There should be information on the dangers of leaving items lying around that reduce access space;
- If there is more CCTV in high rise buildings it could dissuade occupants from leaving items. It can also prevent people who live outside the building from entering and causing antisocial behaviour which could lead to fires.

**3.2 Would images to highlight the damage caused by fires started in common areas be helpful to encourage people not to leave items that will burn in common areas?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

The group gave the following reasons for their answer:

- Images would be very effective, however it is important that there is not too much information included. Highlight key aspects, possibly a before/after picture showing the damage caused by fires;
- Many occupants living in high rise domestic buildings have a lack of information about the dangers of fire safety, so images would be useful;
- Unfortunately there is a sense of laziness amongst some occupants. They know of the dangers of fires, but don't put items in the correct place. They often put the wrong types of items down bin chutes, which can cause blockages and possibly lead to fires.

**3.3 Please let us know if you have any further comments about the fire safety regarding common areas in high rise domestic buildings?**

**Comments from the group included:**

- Concierge/landlord staff need to do more to advertise bulk storage rooms in high rise domestic buildings. Concierge/landlord staff can help to remove large items from the occupant's flat. This will ensure they are not left in places which could lead to fires.

**3.4 If you live in a high rise domestic building, is there a process in place for the assessment and removal of items left in common areas?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

**3.5 Does the process work?**

- Yes
- No
- In part.

**Comments from the group included:**

- It works to a certain extent, however the bulk storage rooms in high rise domestic buildings need to be advertised more, as many of the occupants are unaware of them and will throw large items down bin chutes which can cause a blockage. The bulk storage rooms could be advertised using the following methods:
  - Leaflets/posters;
  - Welcome packs;
  - Roadshows;
  - Notice boards;
  - Plasma screens in doctor's surgeries, housing area offices and shopping centres.

**3.6 What is the best way to get information on keeping common areas safe from fire? Please indicate from 1 to 5 what would be your most and least preferred? (1 most preferred – 5 least preferred):**

- Email;
- Printed leaflet by post;
- SFRS home fire safety visits;
- Video animation on a website;
- Notice Board/poster in the building;
- Printed information from owner/landlord when first moving in;
- Via local residents' groups meetings;
- Other.

The group felt that each of the methods were effective in many ways and would suit different audiences. However the following were rated as the most preferred (1):

- Printed leaflet by post - the group felt that the leaflet could possibly be combined with the rent statement. The leaflet should be made available in different languages for people whose first language is not English and in braille for people who are visually impaired;
- Notice Board/poster in the building - the posters should be made available on each landing and not just the foyer;
- Via local residents' group meetings - the group felt that this could be combined with a visit from SFRS. ETF holds regular High Flats and Federation Meetings and these were viewed as a good method for SFRS to provide information.

Although not as effective as the methods above, the group felt that that the following could also be used to get information on keeping common areas safe from fire.

- Video animation on a website - for example, in Community Centres, Libraries, Housing Area Offices, Doctor's Surgeries and Shopping Centres;
- Printed information from owner/landlord when first moving in;
- Large fridge magnets which contain useful contact details;
- Email - although this was viewed as an effective method, it is important to note that not everyone has access to emails.

**3.7 Any further comments?**

ETF welcomes any measures that seek to strengthen fire safety for high rise domestic buildings, particularly in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. However ETF would like to see the approach to fire safety not just restricted to high rise

buildings, but also to properties such as low rise domestic buildings, sheltered housing complexes and maisonettes which can also be at risk of fires. Cities such as Edinburgh have a vast range of housing and the Scottish Government should examine if any of the approaches being suggested for high rise domestic buildings can also be used for other buildings. This approach should be used across the country.

Tenant participation and tenant empowerment should be at the forefront of the Scottish Government's proposals for strengthening fire safety in high rise domestic buildings, as per the Housing Scotland Act 2001. *'Every local authority landlord and registered social landlord must, by such time as the Scottish Ministers may direct, prepare a strategy (a "tenant participation strategy") for promoting the participation of tenants under a Scottish secure tenancy or a short Scottish secure tenancy in the formulation by the landlord of proposals in relation to the management of housing accommodation and the provision of related services by it, so far as such proposals are likely to affect such tenants.'*