

FS WP 5

Ymchwiliad i ddiogelwch tân mewn tyrau o fflatiau yng Nghymru (Papur Gwyn Llywodraeth Cymru - Adeiladau Mwy Diogel yng Nghymru: Ymgynghoriad)

Inquiry into fire safety in high rise blocks in Wales (Welsh Government white paper - Safer Buildings in Wales: A Consultation)

Ymateb gan: LABC

Response from: LABC

Local Authority Building Control Wales (LABC Cymru) Priorities Following the Publication of the White Paper on the Building Safety Regime

This is no doubt the most extensive Building Safety reform ever in the United Kingdom and a reform that is welcomed by Building Control professionals in Wales.

These measures will serve to reinforce a system of control with clearly identified lines of responsibility throughout the lifecycle of buildings in scope.

The emphasis here is of course on building safety and safety of residents. However, I am sure these measures will also serve to inspire confidence in the industry and in a system that will be fit for purpose. It will also offer a degree of certainty, which will ensure that a tragedy like that which occurred at the Grenfell Tower will never be witnessed again.

This note focuses on the interests of Building Control but it is pleasing to see a role for planning colleagues at gateway 1 with stricter controls and lines of responsibility at gateway 3 for Housing colleagues and of course empowerment of residents who will be occupying these buildings.

Priority for LABC Cymru will of course be delivering what is expected of us from the reform. I am confident that we are in a strong position to do that. We have the necessary skills and competencies along with quality assured systems of control. LABC has been instrumental since Grenfell in establishing a mechanism to achieve high-level competence verification and ISO accredited quality managed back office systems.

What is key to achieving this priority is maintaining, developing and expanding our available staffing resource. I do not think anyone can hide the fact that Building Control officers are an endangered species with the profession suffering from years of austerity.

It is essential that we stop the haemorrhaging of skills and experience to ensure that new talent is introduced and grown to plug that loss.

It is clear that Welsh Authorities have suffered in recent years in being able to recruit and train new officers due to the lack of funding and support.

In view of the above LABC Cymru see the following as a priority and in particular would like to explore how the Welsh government could assist in investing in building control recruitment, training and competence, focussing on:

- More new trainees – there are almost 40% more senior surveyors aged 56+ at risk of retirement from the profession than there are trainees coming in at the bottom.

- More lower risk surveyors need to be trained / gain experience in complex buildings.
- More validated fire surveyors – particularly in South Wales
- Developing a clear career path from trainee to junior and onwards.
Also as a priority, we need to understand more about Welsh government proposals for public sector apprenticeship schemes, recently referenced by the Minister in a Senedd statement on 19 January.

Buildings in occupation; there is a suggested new role for Building Control there. This role may bring additional resourcing issues, which will need to be considered in order to deliver the Welsh Government's agenda.

The establishment of the Joint Inspection Team – what is the implementation plan and how are the multi-agencies going to be resourced?

From an LABC Cymru perspective, we will prioritise the enhancement of our cross boundary working relationships and our regional working agenda, which will serve to provide the necessary expert skills and qualified staff, to provide coverage and support to any Authority that may not have those officers within their establishment.

This reform presents many challenges; LABC Cymru welcomes these proposals and is looking forward to working with Welsh Government to develop a regime that will secure the health, welfare and life safety of residents across Wales, of High Rise Residential Buildings and other like risk premises.

12th February 2021