

FSPS 09

Ymchwiliad i ddiogelwch tân mewn tyrau
o fflatiau yng Nghymru (sector preifat)

Inquiry into fire safety in high rise blocks
in Wales (private sector)

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub De Cymru

Response from: South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

How has the private sector responded to concerns about fire safety in high rise residential blocks?

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service has been working in collaboration with the management of all privately owned high rise buildings across the Service area. Throughout this work the Service has provided all the necessary support ensuring the management of such buildings work efficiently in providing a solution to any fire safety deficiencies that have been identified.

The Service has identified several privately owned residential high rise buildings across the Service area which include student accommodation, private flats and hotels. Since the Grenfell tragedy, the high rise buildings identified across South Wales have all been subject to a Fire Safety Audit and during these audits, a number of fire safety deficiencies have been recorded. The range of deficiencies are varied and include compromised compartmentation and cladding systems, which do not meet the limited combustibility requirements of the Building Regulations. In an effort to deal with the issues, the Service has been provided with funding from Welsh Government to establish a dedicated High Rise Team to ensure that the people who occupy high rise buildings are safe and as important they feel safe occupying these buildings.

It is pleasing to report that both the owners and management of these buildings have been extremely receptive to our involvement, particularly to the recommendations that the High Rise Team have made. There has been very little, if any, resistance to address the fire safety issues that have been identified. The collaborative working between South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the privately owned high rise premises will continue until such time as the fire safety and cladding issues have been resolved and the buildings are fully compliant with all the necessary fire safety standards.

What is the extent of remedial work that needs to be done to meet fire safety standards in Wales, and what arrangements are in place to cover the costs?

As stated above, the fire safety deficiencies identified in high rise buildings range from compromised compartmentation to cladding systems which do not meet the limited combustibility requirements of the Building Regulations. Recommendations have been made to the management of high rise buildings, with failed cladding systems, to carry out a Type 4 Fire Risk Assessment with the significant findings of the risk assessment subsequently being complied with.

As far as the Service is aware, as yet, no high rise buildings which are privately owned with failed cladding systems have been subject to remedial action. However, a number of building owners are still attempting to identify who exactly is responsible for the cost of replacing the cladding and this has resulted in significant delays in relation to the works being completed.

With regards to these privately owned buildings, from the owners' perspective, it is understood it has been difficult in many cases to establish exactly who is responsible for the cost of replacing the cladding. The High Rise Team will continue to work closely with the building owners/managers/responsible persons to ensure that fire safety measures are in place to ensure that the fire safety standards in such buildings remain at an acceptable level. Further details regarding remedial work on individual buildings can be provided if required.

How are leaseholders/residents in Wales being informed about recent developments and reassured about fire safety measures in their block? More broadly, to what extent are residents' views about fire safety being listened to and addressed.

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service have supported and continues to support building owners and residents in various ways to ensure they are reassured about their safety when occupying high rise buildings. The support and reassurance that has been provided is detailed below:-

- It is understood that some residents' meetings have already been arranged by the Responsible Person for the respective buildings, and these meetings are currently ongoing. In such meetings members of the High Rise Team have attended with a view to explain the ongoing issues and at the same time giving the residents an opportunity to express their views and concerns.
- A number of newsletters and information packages on fire safety measures in high rise buildings have been compiled and made available for residents.
- A specific note in relation to fire safety in high rise buildings has been developed and posted on the Service's website and is also available from the Community Fire Safety Department.
- Members of the High Rise Team will continue with its engagement activity with all owners/managers of such buildings.

- In such meetings, residents' have been advised and reassured in relation to the operational changes which have taken place within the Service to deal with fires in high rise buildings.

What, if any, additional practical or financial support is needed from the Welsh or UK Governments to help ensure high rise blocks are safe.

At the time of writing this response, the national inquiry into the Grenfell Tower tragedy is ongoing. This inquiry in time will present its findings, conclusions and recommendations which will go a long way to answering this question.

In the meantime it is the belief of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service that consideration should be given to the following:-

- Regulation within the industry in relation to the competency of those individuals or companies who carry out fire risk assessment inspection and reports on those buildings which come under the scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Additional resources to be made available to Local Authority Planning and Building Control Departments to enable them to deal more efficiently and effectively with the ever increasing number of complex properties being constructed. As a statutory bar (FRS can retrospectively insist on changes to the fire safety features within a building irrespective of what has been agreed previously) no longer exists in relation to the implementation of the Fire Safety Order, such additional resources would facilitate closer collaboration at both planning and build stage with other relevant agencies, to ensure that, as far as possible, when all building works have been completed, fire safety standards will not have been compromised.
- Due to the considerable amount of money involved to remedy the problem of cladding system failure along with the costs of litigation, many building owners, particularly those in the private sector, are experiencing difficulty in resolving their problems. In such circumstances and with a view to resolving issues without delay, it is considered that a formal scheme of arbitration be set up to expedite matters.
- Following the recent publication of the findings of the Dame Hackitt Final Report, early guidance be given by Welsh Government to the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales, in relation to their future direction in this matter e.g. setting up a 'Joint Competent Authority'.