

Draft Fire and Building Safety Engagement Strategy

July 2023

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Introduction

This strategy explains how we will engage and involve residents about the safety of their home. We have worked with residents to develop this strategy, by hosting events, paper and online surveys, and during improvement works. This was to ensure we meet residents' requirements when understanding building and fire safety, and their expectations in terms of communication when they raise concerns and or would like to be involved.

Aims

- Ensure residents are empowered to play an effective role in ensuring their building is and continues to be, safe.
- Set out how information relating to the building and its management will be provided.
- Clarify both residents' and landlords' responsibilities to ensure residents' homes remain safe.
- Identify how we will assess the effectiveness of the Resident Engagement Strategy.
- Clarify when residents will be consulted on for decision about the building.

There are four main strands to how we will engage with residents around building safety:

- Sharing information
- Responsibilities
- Action to take in an event of a fire
- Measuring success

Sharing information

How and where information will be shared

Runnymede Borough Council consulted with residents on how and where information will be shared to ensure that we target residents' most preferred way of communication, and information is most effectively accessible to them.

We recognise the importance of the platform and use of all avenues to ensure that information has the best chance of being read and understood.

These platforms will include:

- At sign up
- New tenant visit
- Dedicated webpages
- Notice boards on every floor
- Emails
- Leaflets and letters
- Pop in sessions to talk about building safety
- Residents' groups where building safety is a regular agenda item.

Should any changes occur to any fire and safety-related topics, including contracted work, we will update the residents through several appropriate communication routes detailed above. The contact info information for both the Engagement & Inclusion Officer and Compliance Team will be provided, should a resident have concerns or would like to discuss details with them further.

We recognise that some of those living in our Independent Retirement Living schemes may prefer non-digital engagement methods. We currently hold bi-monthly meetings in our schemes and will use them to address any changes or answer questions. We also provide quarterly newsletters tailored to each scheme, and any updates will be included in this. Each scheme has a full-time scheme manager whom they can raise safety concerns to, and 24/7 access to Safer Runnymede in the event of an emergency.

Should a serious issue arise within Surrey Towers, we will update residents monthly. This will include any interim safety measures we have put in place, remedial works and further investigation that are required. These updates may be in the form of meetings, noticeboards, updates on our website, newsletters, leaflets and/or letters.

A fire action notice will be installed on each floor of the building. These confirm whether the building has a delayed evacuation strategy in the event of a fire. Information will be co-branded with Surrey Fire and Rescue to add weight to messaging.

We will encourage residents to get involved in making decisions relating to the safety of their buildings. We are currently recruiting for a residents' group for Surrey Towers, where fire safety will be a regular agenda item. Residents will be regularly invited to the meeting, and if they would like to be continuously involved, they can contact the Housing Engagement & Inclusion Officer. Residents can contact them directly at listening@runnymede.gov.uk.

Clear and accessible information

We will provide all residents with the information they need to help them understand the precautions that are in place to mitigate potential fire and building safety risks. We are committed to ensuring information is clear and concise, without jargon and simplifying complex information. We will work with our Resident Readers to review our work to help ensure this.

Information will be provided in different formats on request, such as Braille, large print, or in another language, to ensure all residents have access to this information.

When talking with the residents of Surrey Towers, residents explained they would like to know:

- About the building, including what measures we have in place to mitigate potential fire and building safety risks.
- The responsibilities residents have to reduce fire and building safety risks.
- Who is responsible for safety in Surrey Towers, including the Accountable Person and how to contact them?
- How to raise a complaint or give feedback, and how it is dealt with thereafter.

The following information will also be available on our website, and available on request to residents:

- Engagement Strategy for Building and Fire Safety
- Full fire risk assessment
- The Building Safety Case for Surrey Towers

Advice and support

Access to advice and support is essential to developing residents' confidence, but also to act as a third-party verification to know that we as landlords are keeping the building safe.

Residents will have access to support both internally and externally, including:

- Engagement & Inclusion Officer
- Area Housing Manager
- Compliance team
- Caretakers
- Surrey Fire and Rescue
- Housing Ombudsman
- Building Safety Regulator

We are also looking at setting up a residents' group for Surrey Towers, who can act as advocates for building safety.

How to contact these support links will be provided through regular communications, outlined in section 1.1.

If a resident feels their concerns have not been resolved or addressed, they can follow our formal complaints process to escalate the issue. This information will be regularly circulated, and included in the Fire and Building Safety guide.

Responsibilities

As landlords, we are responsible for keeping buildings and their occupants safe. However, residents have a role to play too, which is why it is important we work together.

We recognise that this is not just about keeping residents safe but making them feel safe too. We will aim to improve communication and landlord and resident relationships to build trust.

This is why it is important residents have a clear understanding of what we as landlords are responsible for and what action we take to ensure residents are safe in their homes.

Landlord responsibilities

- Compliance testing and frequency
- Undertaking an annual fire risk assessment of tenant's homes
- Quarterly fire door inspections

All residents in high-risk stock will be visited and their personal circumstances assessed to see if they are classed as vulnerable and need assistance to evacuate in case of an emergency. The vulnerability information will be shared with Surrey Fire and Rescue with permission from the resident, enabling Surrey Fire and Rescue to identify and evacuate vulnerable people if a major incident occurs. Any Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) Runnymede Borough Council will implement across the high-risk stock.

This will occur annually; therefore, residents are responsible for making us aware if a new vulnerability develops which may affect their ability to evacuate. How to contact us will be included in regular communications, please refer to the Sharing Information section.

Resident responsibilities

We will ensure residents are empowered to play an effective role in making sure that their building is safe. Tenants are responsible for ensuring that they do not create a hazard in their home, for example by storing flammable items on their balcony, by blocking fire escapes, and to be aware of safety measures including the evacuation plan for their building. All resident responsibilities will be included in communication sent to residents.

Residents also play a key role in identifying and reporting hazards that may impact the safety of the building. This may include seeing their neighbour who may not be acting responsibly. We would encourage a resident to remind their neighbours of their responsibility as a resident to keep the building safe, or if they're comfortable to do so to report it to Runnymede Borough Council.

Residents have access to contacting our Compliance team on firesafety@runnymede.gov.uk which includes our Accountable Person. Residents will also have the contact details for their Area Housing Manager and the Caretaking team will be available at Surrey Towers on a regular basis. Information will be displayed in communal areas, both inside and outside the building, and included in the regular communication to residents.

Action to take in the event of a fire

Surrey Towers operate a stay put plan. The action for residents should take in the event of a fire, is displayed on the back of their front doors. We are also installing a Fire Action Notice on every floor in the communal hallways to increase the chances of this information being read and understood.

Understanding the 'stay put' plan

Runnymede Borough Council operate a stay put policy in the event of a fire occurring in a block, which is an approach endorsed by Surrey Fire and Rescue. We recognise that we have a role to play in preparing residents for a possible evacuation. Fire Action Notices will be provided to all residents in Surrey Towers, and opportunities to raise awareness will be provided in various formats as indicated in the section "How and where information will be shared".

Residents will also be able to ask questions on the delayed evacuation through contacting the Council or Surrey Fire and Rescue.

Mitigating potential fire risks

We receive information from Surrey Fire and Rescue on incidents related to Council owned properties. We will treat the information as valuable insight into types of incidents that are

reported by residents. Runnymede will use this information to amend campaigns and information for residents.

All Fire Risk Assessments are undertaken by an independent fire risk assessor who is part of the Fire Protection Association.

Measuring success

Once this strategy is in place, we will conduct an annual review on how effective it has been with engaging with residents.

We will produce a survey for residents to complete. One way of getting the surveys out and encouraging participation will be during our annual inspections of residents' fire doors.

The survey will aim to measure how informed residents feel about building and fire safety and whether their feeling of safety has improved. When engaging with residents about this strategy, we asked these questions so we can compare data to see if there's been an improvement.

In the interest of continuously improving, we will invite residents to contribute new ideas on what information they would like to know about the safety of their building, and how we can make this information more accessible.

We will commit to reviewing feedback from our residents to ensure we continuously improve the service and the communication we provide to them.

We plan to begin recording how many safety concerns are reported to the Council. This may include if bicycles are in communal areas or if residents are having BBQs on balconies. We would aim for there to be a decrease in reports to understand how educational and engaging our communications has been.

For all information contained within this document contact:

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