

## Fire safety guidance in purpose-built blocks of flats Respondent information form – please return by 31 May

The fire safety guidance for purpose-built blocks of flats is sector-owned guidance intended to give practical support and advice to all those with responsibilities for ensuring the safety of residents and others in these types of buildings. This includes private sector and social landlords, managing agents or facility managers, enforcement officers, advice agencies and those carrying out fire risk assessments.

In producing this consultation draft, our consultants – C.S. Todd and Associates Ltd – have been directed by a reference group of key stakeholders. This consultation is now seeking all stakeholder views on the extent to which the draft guidance offers appropriate support and guidance to those with responsibilities for ensuring the safety of purpose built blocks of flats.

The respondent information form is set out to ensure that the reference group obtain a strategic view on issues around readership, presentation and content. There is also an opportunity to feed in detailed comments on content in each chapter of the guidance.

Consideration will be given to all consultation feedback. The final decision on whether to include suggestions and amendments or to reject them will be made by the fire safety guidance in purpose-built blocks of flats reference group.

Please send completed forms back to C.S. Todd and Associates Ltd at [guideconsult@ctodd.co.uk](mailto:guideconsult@ctodd.co.uk) no later than 31 May.

**1. Name/Organisation**  
**Organisation Name**

National Federation of ALMOs (NFA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  *Please tick as appropriate*

**Surname**

Fletcher

**Forename**

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**3. Permissions – I am responding as**

**Individual**  / **Group/Organisation**   
*Please tick as appropriate*

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENT FORM

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

#### Overall comments:

Content:

1. Do you feel that the guidance covers what you would expect it to cover? Please explain your answer.

The NFA very much welcomes this guidance and believes it provides a comprehensive account of technical fire related standards that can be applied to a range of flats, including high, medium, low rise, sheltered, maisonette and cluster flats. We believe this guidance will be highly valuable to responsible persons, fire risk assessors and fire enforcement officers and should provide a clear framework in which all professionals dealing with fire safety can work together to provide a risk appropriate service to residents living in purpose built blocks of flats.

However members of the NFA are divided in their opinion as to whether a Type 1 assessment should ever be used for some types of blocks and some do not believe that assumptions should be made about the history and maintenance of a building. Some members advocate an approach that assumes that the building does have structural deficiencies and that an intrusive survey would always be required unless there is current knowledge which deems it unnecessary. Other members have been told by fire enforcement officers that a full structural survey is required even when they did not consider that necessary in the local circumstances. The guidance needs to be clear about what information should be taken account of and how a decision should be made with regard to what type of fire risk assessment is appropriate so that a more consistent approach can be taken by landlords and fire enforcement officers alike.

It has also been suggested that the guidance could make reference to *BERR's Statutory Code of Practice for Regulators, Regulators' compliance code* published in December 2007 which instructs regulators to consider proportionality in terms of regulation. Our members feel this would be useful for to help achieve some consistency in enforcement across the country.

a. Do you feel there is currently anything missing?

Some members have suggested that an A-Z index would be beneficial.

There has been space left in the guidance for case studies. In our opinion these will be an important feature that could help to illustrate practical examples of doing risk assessments in a variety of building types and highlight good practice within the sector in the on-going management of fire safety issues and communication with residents.

Some members have suggested that this guidance should cover extra care homes as well as sheltered blocks as these types of homes are becoming more popular given the ageing population in this country. In some sheltered housing blocks “extra care” is now being provided as the needs of the existing residents change. If this cannot be included in this document could the guidance make reference to where people should look for that specific guidance.

Some members have experienced a great deal of complaints from residents in respect of trying to enforce a fairly sterile area within communal blocks of low rise flats. It would be useful if the guidance could stipulate a partnership approach with the fire and rescue service so that all parties involved can agree on the best approach to take and then work together to maintain that approach.

The NFA believes that resident engagement is absolutely vital to the success of any fire safety strategy in a purpose built block of flats and that there is insufficient information within the guidance on engaging residents in a debate about managed use or zero tolerance where this is appropriate. We believe it would be appropriate for social landlords to start with the assumption that if the process of a fire risk assessment and the following outcomes are properly explained to the residents there would be more “buy in” from the beginning of the process and more likelihood of a fire risk strategy being successfully implemented. It would be very useful to have some good practice case studies in this area as well as the examples of fire notices in the appendices.

b. Do you feel that there are any areas that are unnecessary?

We have not been able to identify any. It is all very good and useful information.

**Presentation:**

The reference group believe that the document is currently too lengthy and needs to be reduced in size in order to make it more readable for users.

2. Can you suggest any areas you would edit down?

The NFA agrees that the document is very lengthy and some members do think it is too long but there have been no suggestions from members of any areas to cut.

3. Do you have any suggestions to improve the presentation of the information, i.e. use of summary boxes, images to illustrate points?

Members of the NFA have asked for some clearer formatting within the document. Being able to identify the section from the top of the page and having some virtual sub-dividers would be helpful as would an A-Z index at the back. The use of bold type to highlight key messages within each section should be considered. It would also be useful to have a separate checklist of what needs to be checked, by type of property, that could be taken out separately as a tool when out on the estates.

Under part D, pages 38 and 39 it has been suggested that the types of fire risk assessment would be better laid out in a table format:

	Range	Extent	Frequency
Type 1			
Type 2			
Type 3			
Type 4			

Some of our members feel that this would make it easier to understand at a glance and further information on the normal use of each type of assessment could be added for examples of different types of blocks e.g. small, medium and large, high rise, medium rise and low rise.

It has also been suggested that use is made of hyper-links within the document from the contents page to the actual page it refers to would make it easier to use on a computer. The NFA believes that the document needs to be user friendly both whilst being used on a computer at a desk but also when printed off and taken on site as a reference tool.

**Accessibility:**

**The final guidance will be available in a free web based format. A key consideration is how accessible it is to users.**

4. Please comment on how practical, user friendly and easy to interpret you find the draft guidance.

Our members have said that generally they find the guidance very easy to use, concise and reasonably easy to understand.

5. Do you have any ideas on how to improve ease of use of the guidance, i.e. use of summary boxes to draw out key points?

See answers to question 3.

## Diversity

6. Do you think that the guidance deals adequately with vulnerable people such as people with disabilities who need assistance with evacuation in the event of a fire?

Some of our members are concerned that there is now an increased number of vulnerable tenants of all kinds living in social housing general needs stock. This is mainly due to a change in social care policy where floating support is now the norm rather than specialised housing. This means that there are now many more people who are either physically disabled living within the general needs stock or people with a variety of mental health problems or not have English as a first language which may make it difficult for them to exit the building during an evacuation. Some members think it is therefore necessary to assess the capabilities of each individual tenant as part of a fire risk assessment

The guidance currently says in para 70.6 “that limitations (physical) of residents should be taken into account when undertaking assessments” and that information will be made available to the fire service in the event of a fire for sheltered housing but does not advocate this approach for general needs housing.

The guidance is clear that such information would be practically very difficult to get hold of and then would need to be kept up to date otherwise it may do more harm than good but given the concern of social landlords of an ever increasing number of vulnerable residents it would be useful if the guidance could discuss the pros and cons of such approaches more fully and offer case studies where organisations do successfully manage this sort of information for general needs housing.

## Overall impression:

7. Overall, do you find the guidance useful to you/not useful to you? Please explain your answer.

Our members very much welcome the production of this guidance and feel that it will be of great use to them in their day to day work.

### Detailed comments by section:

The following section is to enable you to feedback any detailed comments on each part of the document

8. Please enter specific comments on Part A in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change

9. Please enter specific comments on Part B in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change
Page 18	Table, 8 <sup>th</sup> bullet point	GE	This bullet point seems to contradict paragraph 24.3 as the bullet point says that “Arrangements for maintaining stairways clear of smoke need to be provided” but 24.3 says “smoke containment is now preferred as the means of keeping common escape stairways clear of smoke, while smoke dispersal is deprecated”	Some clarification between the two points.

10. Please enter specific comments on Part C in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change

11. Please enter specific comments on Part D in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change
35.1	List of types of fire risk assessment.	TE	<p>Members have commented that Types 1 and 3 do not involve consideration for means of escape or fire detection. Their understanding of the term “suitable and sufficient” (FSO Article 9) means that when assessing any risk you should consider all foreseeable risk and therefore it is considered that the both means of escape and fire detection should be an integral part of all types of assessment.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is suggested that Type 1 and 3 assessments would only include an examination of a sample of flat entrance doors. Yet, Part C (29.3) considers that flat entrance doors are critical to the safety of the common parts and as such, it would seem appropriate that any FRA would involve an inspection/appreciation of the fire rating of all flat entrance doors.</p> <p>Paragraph 60.33 states that doors leading onto corridors should be notional FDS30. In addition ADB Appendix B Table B1 (Provision for Fire Doors) states that 5. Forming part of the enclosure of: a. a protected lobby approach (or protected corridor) to a stairway should have a minimum fire resistance of FD30S. Therefore this must be assessed by gaining entry to all properties.</p>	

		<p>Any landlord 'new' to the FSO may, on reading the guidance may assume that by carrying out a Type 1 will satisfy the requirements of the Order. It is considered by some of our members that it will not as it fails to address MOE and fire detection.</p> <p>Paragraph 34.2 "Reference to the fire risk assessment must consider the general fire precautions defined in the FSO. Of these, the principal ones for a purpose-built block of flats includes means of escape"</p>	
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12. Please enter specific comments on Part E in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change
43.1	1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph	ED	"In 2008, deliberate ignition was the cause of some 17% of fires in dwellings. Theses fires accounted for 45% of the total number of deliberate fires in all buildings."	To rephrase as it is unclear what the two % relate to – is deliberate ignition the cause of 17% of all fires or 45% of all fires?
44.10		TE	FSO Article 14 14.—(l) says "Where necessary in order to safeguard the safety of relevant persons, the responsible person must ensure that routes to emergency exits from premises and the exits themselves are kept clear at all times." Yet the Guidance suggests that landlords may allow managed use, include the storage of bicycles, prams and mobility scooters. Some of our members have commented that prams and scooters are manufactured with flammable plastics and materials and should not be stored in common parts under any circumstances.	

44.19		TE	Some of our members feel that if mobility scooters are allowed under a managed use policy it would only encourage a potential obstruction as well as provide residents with a temptation to put them on charge whilst outside their property. It is therefore not considered practical to manage scooters in communal areas and some members would welcome a national policy on this issue as it is notoriously difficult to balance the fire safety risks of a block of flats and the mobility needs of individual tenants.	
Page 52			Some members have asked for a consistent approach to what constitutes a risk in communal areas, for example, views on plant pots, carpets, pictures etc. It would be useful to have something that is simple to understand and can be shared with residents.	

13. Please enter specific comments on Part F in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change
51.1 and 51.2		GE	Some NFA members believe that there needs to be more guidance as to what is required for a stay put policy implementation.	Training of staff, information to residents etc. is not mentioned but is an integral part of such a policy.
Page 78 paragraph 58.4		ED	This appears to contradict itself stating flat doors <u>should</u> be self closing, as opposed to earlier and later pages which state <u>must</u> be self closing.	
Paragraph 65/page 95		GE	<u>Refuse and chute rooms</u> : Members have commented that this seems to be new build design guidance and they are not clear how this content influences inspection of existing buildings.	Make it clear what should apply to existing buildings with regard to refuse and chute rooms.

Paragraph 68/page 99		GE	<u>Security locks and access systems</u>	Some members have suggested banning security gates where fire resistant/security doors fitted in line with Article 14 2 (f) 'emergency doors must not be so locked or fastened that they cannot be easily and immediately opened by any person who may require to use them in an emergency.
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14. Please enter specific comments on Part G in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change
81.3 to 81.5		GE	These paragraphs seem to indicate that all fire resisting doorsets should be inspected every 6 months, including leasehold flat entrance doors where possible. This seems to contradict the earlier suggestion that a type 1 fire risk assessment would only look at a sample of flat entrance doors.	Clarify if all flat entrance doors should be checked or only a sample. My members are inclined to think all should be checked regularly.  It would also be useful to say that even where there is no legal right of entry under the lease, landlords should try to engage leaseholders in the work that they are doing and explain the reasons for it as many residents may welcome this check and want it done for the safety of themselves and their neighbours. Also refer to powers under the HHSR that a local authority could use.
78.10 to 78.13		GE	It is noted earlier in paragraph 70.6 "that limitations (physical) of residents should be taken into account when undertaking assessments" for sheltered housing and that information will be made available to the fire service in the event of a	The guidance is clear that such information would be practically very difficult to get hold of and then would need to be kept up to date otherwise it may do more harm than good but maybe this health warning needs

			<p>fire but in general needs housing there seems to be an increase in residents with reduced mobility but the exact needs will not be known to adult social care or the landlord. Some ALMOs think therefore it is necessary to assess the capabilities of each individual tenant as part of a fire risk assessment for all types of blocks of flats.</p>	<p>to be in bold type so people understand the implications of taking such an approach.</p> <p>But maybe you could you add “usually” in between “It is not” and “realistic” in paragraph 78.12?</p> <p>And given the concern of social landlords of an ever increasing number of vulnerable residents it would be useful if the guidance could discuss the pros and cons of such approaches more fully and offer case studies where organisations do successfully manage this sort of information for general needs housing.</p>
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15. Please enter specific comments on the appendices in the box below

Clause no. / sub clause no. / annex	Paragraph / figure / table / note e.g. table 1	Type of comment: (GE general / TE technical / ED editorial)	Comment (justification for change)	Proposed change

If you have any enquires on the consultation process that are not of a technical nature please contact:

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