



## **FIRE SAFETY IN RESIDENTIAL HIGH RISE ACCOMMODATION Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

Bedford Borough Council is working to support Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (BFRS), local housing providers, registered social landlords, private sector landlords and other bodies to review and assess the safety of residents within the Borough. Officers have been working proactively following the tragic incident that happened at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 and in response to guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Borough Council has provided some Frequently Asked Questions that residents may find helpful, these FAQs have been produced as a result of some of the enquires the Borough Council and partner agencies have received.

### **What is a high rise tower block?**

BFRS have defined a high rise tower block as a building that consists of 5 floors or more and has a height of 18 metres and above.

### **What happened in the Grenfell case?**

Although a full investigation into the tragedy is still to be completed, early indications have suggested that a fire started in one of the flats within the tower, this fire breached the envelope of the flat and caused the exterior cladding to ignite. The fire spread across the exterior of the building, as well as into the internal areas of the building (flats, communal areas etc) over a number of hours, resulting in the devastation and destruction of the building, with a tragic loss of life.

### **Was there a problem with the cladding used on the building?**

The cladding used on the Grenfell Tower was made of an Aluminium Composite Material (ACM). It has now been determined that this specific type of cladding does not meet combustibility and fire safety standards as required by current building regulations.

### **What do Councils have to do as a result of the Grenfell incident?**

Where local councils own and manage housing stock, commonly known as 'council housing', local councils have been instructed by DCLG to review and assess and the cladding used on its residential high rise buildings. Part of this review and assessment includes sending samples of ACM cladding, or cladding of an unknown type/standard, to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) in order test the fire safety properties of the cladding.

Should the results of the fire safety testing identify that the cladding does not meet combustibility and fire safety standards, as required by current building regulations, local councils should take action to mitigate any risks that may affect the safety of residents.

### **There are blocks of flats in Bedford Borough, do these buildings have the same cladding?**

BFRS have confirmed that there are 32 high rise buildings (as defined above) in Bedford Borough and none of these buildings contain the specific cladding materials used in the Grenfell case.

### **Does the Council have to check it's housing stock?**

Bedford Borough Council does not own or manage any high residential housing stock. All high rise tower blocks and 'council housing' stock was transferred to Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association (BPHA) in 1990.

That being said the Borough Council is working to support BFRS, local housing providers, registered social landlords (RSLs), private sector landlords and other bodies to review and assess the safety of residents within the Borough.

**If there are no council-owned tower blocks in the area, but some housing associations / RSLs, what is happening?**

As well as writing to Councils regarding 'council housing', DCLG also wrote to all RSLs asking them to carry out the same checks as local councils who own housing stock.

**Should I be worried about the privately-owned tower blocks in the area?**

The Borough Council has an interest in the overall safety and security of local communities, residents and local businesses. Residential landlords in the private sector are also able to use the DCLG testing facility through the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

The Borough Council has already written to all local landlords and management companies of privately-owned tower blocks that were identified by BFRS where the buildings are over 18 metres.

**What about low rise buildings?**

Buildings less than 18 metres in height are not subject to the same requirements in terms of cladding due to the lower risk nature of the buildings.

**What about schools, hospitals, student accommodation and other buildings?**

Where BFRS identified high rise buildings that fall into these categories, the Borough Council has already proactively written to these organisations and institutions, advising them of the potential risks presented by ACM cladding if it is present on site. However the priority at this stage is for buildings where there is residential/sleeping accommodation.

**What is the Government doing in response to the Grenfell case?**

DCLG announced on 27 June 2017 that a new independent expert advisory panel will be established to advise on any immediate measures that can be put in place to make buildings safe following the Grenfell Tower fire.

This expert panel will look at any immediate action that is required so the public can be confident everything possible is being done to make all public and private buildings safe as quickly as possible. The Panel will be made up of a range of building and fire safety experts, and will be chaired by Sir Ken Knight, former London Fire Commissioner and former Government Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser.

Other core members of the panel will be Dr Peter Bonfield, Chief Executive of the Building Research Establishment, Roy Wilsher, Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council and Amanda Clack, President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and a Partner at EY. The panel have a wealth of experience in fire and building safety, including testing processes. They will also draw in wider technical expertise as necessary to inform their advice to the Communities Secretary.

A separate independent Public Inquiry will investigate what happened and who was responsible for the disaster.

**What is the purpose of the Public Inquiry?**

The Prime Minister announced on 29 June 2017 that a Public Inquiry would be established concerning the tragic incident. The purpose of the Inquiry is to discover

what happened at Grenfell Tower and to make recommendations to prevent a similar tragedy happening again. The Inquiry is being chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, a highly experienced former judge of the Court of Appeal.

The immediate priority is to establish the facts of what happened at Grenfell Tower in order to take the necessary action to prevent a similar tragedy from happening again.

**Where can I get Further Information?**

Further information is available from the following organisations:

<p><u>Bedfordshire Fire &amp; Rescue Service</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.bedsfire.com">www.bedsfire.com</a>          Telephone: 01234 845000          Email: <a href="mailto:contact@bedsfire.com">contact@bedsfire.com</a></p>	<p><u>Bedford Borough Building Control Service</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.bedford.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/building_control.aspx">www.bedford.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/building_control.aspx</a>          Telephone: 01234 718081          Email: <a href="mailto:buildingcontrol@bedford.gov.uk">buildingcontrol@bedford.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><u>Bedford Borough Private Sector Housing</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.bedford.gov.uk/housing.aspx">www.bedford.gov.uk/housing.aspx</a>          Telephone: 01234 718099          Email: <a href="mailto:ehadmin@bedford.gov.uk">ehadmin@bedford.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><u>BPHA</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.bpha.org.uk">www.bpha.org.uk</a>          Telephone: 0330 100 0272          Email: <a href="mailto:info@bpha.org.uk">info@bpha.org.uk</a></p>
<p><u>Aldwyck Housing</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.aldwyck.co.uk">www.aldwyck.co.uk</a>          Telephone: 0300 500 6262          Email: <a href="mailto:info@aldwyck.co.uk">info@aldwyck.co.uk</a></p>	<p><u>Guinness Housing</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.guinnesspartnership.com">www.guinnesspartnership.com</a>          Telephone: 0303 123 1890          Email: <a href="http://www.guinnesspartnership.com/contact-us/general-queries/">www.guinnesspartnership.com/contact-us/general-queries/</a></p>
<p><u>Grand Union</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.grandunionhousing.co.uk">www.grandunionhousing.co.uk</a>          Telephone: 0300 123 4844          Email: <a href="mailto:enquiry@grandunionhousing.co.uk">enquiry@grandunionhousing.co.uk</a></p>	<p><u>Genesis</u></p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.genesisha.org.uk">www.genesisha.org.uk</a>          Telephone: 033 3000 3000          Email: <a href="http://www.genesisha.org.uk/genesis_housing_association/contact_us.aspx">www.genesisha.org.uk/genesis_housing_association/contact_us.aspx</a></p>

*\* These FAQs will be regularly reviewed and updated as necessary.*