



Foresters Tower

Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy

November 2024

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Introduction

Following on from the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, the government published the Building Safety Act 2022 and introduced a new Building Safety Regulator in 2022.

The Building Safety Act mainly focuses on high-rise buildings which are classified as being eighteen meters and above and all five of Oxford City Council's tower blocks fall into this category:

- Evenlode Tower
- Windrush Tower
- Foresters Tower
- Plowman Tower
- Hockmore Tower

The Building Safety Act also requires landlords to have what is known as '*Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategies*' for each of their high-rise buildings. The purpose of these strategies is to promote participation of residents in the making of decisions relating to the safety of their home and building. Oxford City Council is committed to ensuring that residents feel safe in their homes. Oxford City Council understands the importance of engaging with residents and involving them with building safety.

The first Oxford City Council Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategies for our tower blocks is important, as they explain our approach to ensure all residents are aware of key building safety messages and know how they can raise building safety concerns with us.

In drafting this strategy, we consulted with and took on board the views of:

- Residents living in Foresters Tower
- Building Safety Resident Focus Group
- Non-resident leaseholders

Context

Following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower in June 2017, critical questions were raised for everyone involved in social housing, including residents, landlords, developers, and local and national government.

The government took immediate action, starting with an independent review of building regulations and fire safety to make recommendations that will ensure a robust regulatory system for the future, and that residents feel that the buildings they live in are safe. The 300-day public inquiry closed in November 2022.

The review concluded that the entire system of fire safety for tall buildings needed major reform and that residents' safety needed to be a greater priority through the entire life cycle of a building – from design and construction, through to when people are living in their homes.

The government accepted the review's recommendations and the Building Safety Act 2022, as enacted, set out proposals to provide the biggest changes to the building safety regime for nearly 40 years. The Government states that this means:

“Residents in high-rise buildings will have more say in the management of their building. They will be able to raise building safety concerns directly to the owners and managers of buildings, who will have a duty to listen to them. And if residents feel concerns are being ignored, they can raise them with the Building Safety Regulator.”

Alongside the Building Safety Act, the Government published a Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents' which outlined plans for new regulation, a strengthened Housing Ombudsman to speed up complaints handling, and a commitment to a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures that all social landlords will have to report against, which came into force April 2023. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 also strengthened the powers of the Regulator for Social Housing and provided that compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code was now on a statutory footing.

These fundamental changes will improve building and fire safety, so that people will be, and will feel, safer in their homes.

In 2015, we started a Tower Block Refurbishment Programme with Fortem Energy Services Ltd (previously known as Wilmot Dixon Energy Services Ltd) as our appointed contractor. As part of this programme, we carried out a variety of works to all five tower blocks, which included:

External Works

- Structural repairs (Cavity wall ties on brick sections, removal of stone panels at Hockmore Tower)
- New insulation (Located on the external face of all walls and new roof insulation in conjunction with new roof finishes)
- New rain-screen cladding (Combination of aluminium curtain walling and render systems)
- New windows and doors (Powder coated aluminium double-glazed windows with trickle vents, powder coated aluminium doors and balcony systems).

- Improved pedestrian access (Landscaping in the vicinity of the entrances removing parking adjacent to the entrance and enhance emergency service access).
- Improved parking (Parking re-designed at Blackbird Leys and garages removed at Plowman and Foresters to better manage residents' vehicles).
- Signage (New external and internal signage).

Internal Works

- New flat heating (Electric systems similar to existing).
- New flat ventilation (Extractor fans in bathroom and kitchen).
- New sprinkler system (Located in every flat and bin store linked to the fire service).
- New fire alarm and detection (Located through the communal areas linked to the fire service).
- New communal lighting (LED fittings and new controls).
- Improved recycling (Recycling bins relocated into the building with bin chutes in the new lobby to reduce fly-tipping and manage arson).
- Lift refurbishment (New controls, energy saving motors, lighting, finishes).
- New entrance (New entrance lobby with internal cycle storage, letter box's, recycling facilities with adapted CCTV and intercom systems).

Background

Oxford City Council is responsible for managing and maintaining five high-rise blocks of flats, providing a total number of 348 properties. Several flats within the blocks are in leasehold ownership, where Oxford City Council is the freeholder.

Foresters Tower is a fifteen-storey high-rise building located within Wood Farm, Oxford. It has eighty-five flats in total, with a range of both one and two bedroom homes.

It houses a diverse range of residents, ranging from single people or couples with families with children. This changes over time, as do residents' needs and circumstances.

Strategy Aims

We will engage with residents with the objective of making sure that:

- We foster a strong culture of fairness, courtesy, and respect whereby residents feel listened to and can trust us as a landlord.
- Residents feel safe in the buildings in which they live.
- Communication is tailored to meet residents' needs.
- Residents know how to report problems in their flat or communal areas which lead to safety concerns.
- Residents are aware of the ways in which they can get involved and influence building safety decisions and the services we provide.
- Know how to make a complaint if feel their concerns are not being listened to.

Strategy Objectives

The strategy sets out our approach to meaningful resident engagement relating to the safety of their homes. The strategy's three themed objectives are:

1. **Listen and communicate:** Communicate with all our residents in high-rise buildings in ways that meets their needs, keeping them up to date and well informed on building safety information and making sure that our residents' voices are heard and acted upon.
2. **Involve:** Involve residents and empower them to play a key role in helping keep their homes and building safe, as part of this we will also make sure that residents are aware of their responsibilities.
3. **Evaluate:** Continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of engagement opportunities and participation so that we can continue to maintain and strengthen our relationship with residents.

Objective 1: Listen and Communicate

Communicate with all our residents in high-rise buildings in ways that meets their needs, keeping them up to date and well informed on building safety information and making sure that our residents' voices are heard and acted upon.

Ensuring residents are kept up to date with building safety information is important to us, this includes:

- Notifying residents of upcoming visits.
- Information on the safety of the building.
- Relevant responsive repairs and scheduled maintenance and who will carry out the work.

We use a range of appropriate and tailored communication methods and tools, adapted to our residents needs to share key messages with them including:

- Letters, text message and email
- Oxford City Council's website
- Quarterly tower block newsletter
- Quarterly Tenant in Touch magazine (plus a monthly digital edition)
- Noticeboards in communal areas within buildings
- Regular building safety checks



We are always looking at more efficient ways of using the tools listed above. We also consider new innovative ways to improve the way we communicate and provide building and fire safety information to residents, with the recent launch of our new 'Fire Safety Advice' webpage. Scan the QR code to find out more.

We will continue to:

- ✓ Consult with residents to better understand their communication requirements and preferences, including what information they want to receive, in what way and how often.
- ✓ Use all feedback methods to listen to the views of residents and make sure we act and improve our services accordingly.
- ✓ Communicate all important information and updates to residents in a way to suit their needs including non-resident leaseholders.
- ✓ Provide easy to understand, transparent and accessible information.
- ✓ Keep Ward Councillors informed of relevant matters concerning high-rise buildings.

In the year ahead, we will commit to:

- Build on our insight to better understand individual support needs.
- Improve the information residents receive about the management of high-rise buildings.
- Review and where appropriate improve signage within the buildings.
- Develop a building safety communication plan.
- Publicise and promote everyone's roles and responsibilities in maintaining the safety of our building, including landlord, resident, and contractors.
- Review how we collect and record residents' views.
- Complete Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP) to all high-rise residents and review them on an annual basis or where a new tenant moves in.
- Make sure that where people have specific communication needs, information is made available to them in appropriate formats.
- Make use of QR codes for residents to quickly access online content, and to signpost where more information can be accessed.

- Provide a Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy to all new tenants.
- Share the building safety case report for your block.
- Raise awareness of the Building Safety Regulator, who you can also approach for independent advice and support.
- Explore different ways of providing information to residents for example, TV display screens in lobby areas.
- Work with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to explore different ways of providing information to residents such as instructional videos and step-by-step guides.
- Provide a Fire Safety Booklet to all high-rise residents including new tenants and review it on an annual basis

Objective 2: Involve

Involve residents and empower them to play a key role in helping keep their homes and building safe, as part of this we will also make sure that residents are aware of their responsibilities.

We understand the importance of resident involvement around decision making and ensuring their homes and building are safe and are committed to empowering residents to get involved. We've recently introduced a new Building Safety Resident Focus Group where residents from all five high-rise buildings come together to discuss key issues within their block, work together to help resolve issues highlighted and act as a representative for their block.

We use a variety of different methods when carrying out consultations, these include:

- Face to face sessions within your community
- Online Questionnaires
- Arranged home visits
- Scheduled door knocking
- Postal questionnaire
- Telephone questionnaire

We will continue to:

- ✓ Develop, promote and encourage residents to join the Building Safety Resident Focus Group across all high-rise buildings.
- ✓ Continue to work closely with residents and partners to tackle block security issues such as tailgating and rough sleepers.
- ✓ Use a variety of consultation and feedback methods for residents to participate in.
- ✓ Utilise the quarterly tower block newsletter to publish results from consultations and general feedback to ensure transparency with residents.
- ✓ Ensure residents are aware of their responsibilities living within a high-rise building.
- ✓ Collect and store information in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In the year ahead, we will commit to:

- Carry out meaningful consultation with residents on a regular basis to ensure residents are involved in all decision making in relation to building safety.
- Ensure future consultations are for a minimum period of three weeks.
- Consult and involve residents on planned works relating to building safety e.g., fire door replacement and safety checks.
- Engage with residents at the start of any planned works process to help minimise disruption.
- Exploring the use of 'webinars,' inviting residents to a webinar on building safety and sharing this more widely
- Seek to recruit a tenant who lives in a high-rise building to the Tenant and Leaseholder Board.

Objective 3: Evaluate

Continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of engagement opportunities and participation so that we can continue to maintain and strengthen our relationship with residents.

We will continue to:

- ✓ Record, monitor and evaluate resident engagement so that we can report our outcomes and our customer contributions towards building safety.
- ✓ Evaluate information received from residents' comments, complaints and other feedback and use this to make sure safety related matters that emerge from these are investigated and addressed as a priority.

In the year ahead, we will commit to:

- Survey residents' views on building safety and safety related information.
- Actively seek new opportunities to engage with residents and increase participation.
- Publish feedback and effectiveness of resident engagement in a 'you said, we did' format where necessary in the quarterly tower block newsletter and online Building Safety webpage.
- Regularly work with the building safety resident focus group to review the methods we use to encourage other residents to get involved in building safety decisions and record their feedback.
- Make sure that we are enabling equal and fair engagement opportunities that are accessible for all residents.
- Carry out an annual survey with residents to assess how effectively we are communicating key messages and residents understanding of these.

- Evaluate and publish the outcomes of resident engagement in building safety – reporting to the Tenant and Leaseholder Board.
- Ensure that a responsibility of the Tenant and Leaseholder Board is to scrutinise our compliance of the consumer standards, including health and safety.

How we will measure performance

We will evaluate the success of our ongoing action, and commitments for the year ahead by monitoring:

Our performance in 2023/24 on:

- Fire Safety Checks
- Lift Safety Checks
- Fire Risk Assessment Actions
- Electrical Safety Checks (individual flats)
- Electrical Safety Checks (communal)
- Fire Panel Service
- Fire Service Equipment
- Sprinkler Servicing (individual flats)
- Sprinkler Servicing (communal)
- Dry Riser Unit Checks
- Water Hygiene (legionella) Checks
- Emergency Lighting
- Damp & Mould

What you have told us so far

During the autumn of 2023 we carried out a consultation with residents to gain a better understanding on if they feel safe in their home and building, what they wanted to know more about and their preferred method of communication.

We thank all those residents who took part in our consultation and those who wanted to be part of a Resident Focus Group. Your feedback has helped us set the objectives for this strategy.

There were a variety of ways in which residents could participate in, these included:

- Online questionnaire using QR code.
- Telephone.
- Scheduled door knocking.
- Arranged home visits.
- Face to face sessions in local community venues.

Sixteen residents took part in the consultation, this equals to 18.8%.

We learnt that:

- Building safety for residents is not just about fire safety, it's about our whole approach to managing the building and people's homes.
- Block security is important to residents.
- The majority of residents feel safe in their homes but do not feel safe in their building.

- We can do more to communicate with residents on upcoming visits/checks within individual flats and communal areas.
- We need to improve our communication methods and ensure these are tailored to residents' needs.
- We need to ensure all residents understand and know how to report anti-social behaviour within the block and have the confidence it will be dealt with accordingly.
- We can do more to inform residents what our building safety responsibilities are as a landlords.
- We need to ensure all residents know what the evacuation process is for their block to keep them and others safe.

Building Safety Concerns for residents in high-rise buildings

What is defined as an Accountable Person

Accountable Person can be the organisation or person who owns or has a legal obligation to maintain the common parts of a building, for example corridors or lobbies.

Accountable Person: Oxford City Council

What is defined as a residential high-rise building:

- at least 7 floors or is at least 18 metres in height
- at least 2 residential units

What is a relevant building safety concern?

Your concerns may be about the performance of an accountable person or principal accountable person. For example:

- their communications to residents
- responses to raised concerns
- how they manage building safety risks

You can also raise concerns about building safety risks, which are structural safety issues and spread of fire issues. For example:

- flammable cladding on the outside of a building
- fire doors or smoke extraction which are not working or missing that may increase the risk of fire spread
- failure of the building's structure, such as parts of the building collapsing, cracks, or parts of the building falling off.

How to raise a building safety concern

To raise a building safety concern you can;

- Call 01865 249811
- Complete an online form using the QR code below



If you are not satisfied with how we have dealt with a building safety concern you're able to raise a complaint, by using one of the following methods:

Complete our Customer Feedback form by scanning the QR code



- Phone: 01865 249811
- In writing: Customer Services, Oxford City Council, Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford, OX1 1BX
- In person: Oxford Westgate Library, Queen Street, Westgate, Oxford, OX1 1DJ (Open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10am to 3pm)

Complaints Process

How will complaints be dealt with?

Once the Council has assessed a contact as being a complaint under this procedure the complaint will be handled in accordance with the following stages.

Stage 1: Initial response

The Council will aim to acknowledge receipt of a complaint within five working days and in doing so will advise who will be dealing with the complaint and the expected time for providing a response.

An initial review will be undertaken by a designated officer, or if the service is provided on behalf of the Council by a Council company, it will normally be an officer employed by that company. If there is insufficient information to enable the complaint to be investigated the designated officer will contact the complainant to request further information.

The designated officer will review the complaint and may make their own inquiries, which may include speaking to other officers, reviewing any relevant and available records, documents or policies, and undertaking desktop research.

A written response will normally be provided within ten working days of acknowledgement of the complaint. If this is not possible, an explanation and a timescale for the initial response will be provided to the complainant. This should not exceed a further ten working days without good reason.

Designated officers dealing with stage 1 complaints are empowered to take reasonable and proportionate steps to seek to resolve complaints at stage 1, which may include, for example, offering an apology on behalf of the Council, remedial

action, reparation or any other remedy considered to be appropriate in the circumstances.

Stage 2: Review

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial review, they can request that a manager investigates and responds to their complaint.

The investigating manager will normally be the Customer Care & Complaints Manager. Depending on the nature and circumstances of the complaint, the manager may arrange for a different manager or Head of Service to investigate and respond to a complaint. For example, if the complaint concerns them personally. The investigating manager will aim to acknowledge the complaint at Stage 2 within 5 working days and respond within 20 working days from acknowledgement. If this is not possible then an explanation and a timescale for the stage 2 response will be provided to the complainant. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Refer a complaint to the Building Safety Regulator

The Council expects that most complaints will be resolved within the two stages described above.

If, having exhausted this procedure, a complainant feels that their building safety complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily, they can refer the matter to the Building Safety Regulator for an independent investigation. The stage 2 response will include the contact details of the relevant service.

You can refer a complaint to the Building Safety Regulator if you:

- are not satisfied with the final response
- have unresolved issues

- have not got a response

You can contact the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) using one of the following methods:



Complete an online form by scanning the QR code

Phone: 0300 790 6787

*Open Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm (except
Wednesdays which is 10am to 5pm)*

Documents you need to provide

If you refer your complaint to the Building Safety Regulator, it's helpful if you can provide:

- a copy of the final response from the principal accountable person or accountable person
- photos or video recordings of the issue
- emails, letters, and any documents about the issue

You should provide any information you have about actions that the principal accountable person or accountable person are going to take or have already taken.

Review

We will review our strategy in accordance with government guidance.

We will review this strategy:

- at least every 2 years
- after every consultation of the strategy
- after a mandatory occurrence report
- after the completion of significant material alterations to the building

We will record each review, whether or not we make changes to the strategy.

Document Control

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Notes

