



Anne Clarke AM
Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee

DLUHC Consultation Response

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(Sent by email)

17 March 2023

London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee – response to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) consultation on sprinklers in care homes, removal of national classes, and staircases in residential buildings

The London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning (FREP) Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DLUHC’s consultation on sprinklers in care homes, removal of national classes, and staircases in residential homes. This letter is our response to the consultation.

The London Assembly is the democratic voice of London, with 25 London Assembly Members elected either to represent 14 constituencies or the whole capital. The Assembly scrutinises the decisions and actions of the Mayor of London. The FREP Committee is one of ten Committees in the Assembly which focus on thematic areas of scrutiny. For more information on the work of this Committee please do visit our website [here](#).

The FREP Committee reviews the priorities and objectives of the London Fire Commissioner (LFC) and scrutinises how the LFC exercises their functions. It can also look into any matters which it considers to be of importance to fire and rescue in Greater London.

The Committee's response draws on evidence from sessions with the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and Deputy Mayor for Fire & Resilience (DMFR) and others. Transcripts of these can be found [here](#).

The Committee broadly welcomes the proposals set out in the consultation, which will establish building safety standards that are urgently needed and should offer better protection for residents of high-rise residential buildings and care homes.

At the Committee's meeting on 7 March 2023, we asked guests from the Greater London Authority (GLA), LFB and DLUHC about the consultation proposals.

Baroness Twycross, Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience (DMFR), told the Committee that she: "welcome[d] the Government's recent consultation announcement. It is a really important step change in the approach from Government and should, at the end of the consultation, provide the really clear guidance that is urgently required."

She went on to say: "At the moment, it is a bit of a muddle and people are confused about what might be required. The fire safety and safety of the buildings' eventual users is central to everyone involved in building management, design, delivery and construction and should be."

She also told the Committee that Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development (DMHRD) who leads on building safety and has been discussing these matters with GLA colleagues and with LFB "on the most sensible approach." However, the DMHRD identified that clarity of guidance is: "required and should be legislated for [as] one of the most important things."

Second staircases for buildings over 30 metres in height

Deputy Commissioner Jonathan Smith told the Committee that LFB: "welcome the consultation that is coming through around risk at height." He went on to say that: "we (LFB) very much welcome [the proposal], because what that will do is it will set a standard, whereas hitherto we have not seen that standard before."

The Deputy Commissioner added: "Our position will always be that we are very, very supportive where we can see the introduction of increased mitigations, particularly of buildings at heights, whether it is 11 metres, 18 metres or at 30 metres. We need to work within the built environment that we face on a day-to-day basis to make sure that what is achievable can be delivered. As far as the use of sprinklers and the use of secondary stairwells are concerned, the safety case for both is very, very clear and we will support that to see that that is introduced wherever it is possible to do so."

He went on to say: "That includes both sprinkler provision and the use of secondary stairwells to make sure that means of escape are protected and to make sure that where we can, we can extinguish the fire in its earliest stage. Clearly, that is what we would want to see."

The Committee asked LFB about applying the second stairwell requirement to a lower height, in particular to those of 18 metres and above which have been focused on as being 'high risk' in the Government's Building Safety Programme. In response Jonathan Smith said: "the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has spoken about 18 metres being married up with the risk that is contained within the Building Safety Act. We think that there is some legitimacy in that to make sure that we have synergy between the two."

In addition to the meeting on 7 March, the Committee also had the opportunity on 23 November 2022 to see a full-scale high-rise fire exercise undertaken by LFB. The Committee found this visit informative and noted the difficulties faced by firefighters who are trying to ascend a staircase with the equipment required to tackle a fire whilst at the same time the residents are attempting to evacuate the building using the same staircase.

Given the evidence that the Committee heard in respect of the proposal to require a second staircase for buildings over 30 metres in height, the Committee welcomes this consultation as the first step in setting a standard for builders and developers. However, as outlined by the NFCC, high-risk buildings are defined in the Building Safety Act as those of 18 metres and above.¹ Therefore, the Committee asks the Government to extend its proposal to set the requirement for a second staircase for high-rise residential buildings over 30 metres to include buildings of 18 metres or over.

As the Deputy Commissioner informed the Committee: "it is easier when it comes to new builds to make sure that [fire safety] is included in both the planning process and the building process." Furthermore, he said that LFB "want[s] to see as many fire safety precautions being built into those buildings right from the word go. It is much easier to make sure that those are in position from the word go, rather than trying to retrofit them later on." The Committee recommends the Government take this view on board when responding to the consultation to ensure that all safety precautions are taken when new builds are approved.

Sprinklers in care homes

The Committee welcomes the Government's proposal to require sprinklers to be fitted in all care homes which is what LFB called for in a statement it issued in March 2018. However, the Committee asks that the Government look into the potential of mandating sprinklers in other building settings.

In its March 2018 statement, LFB stated that: "there is an average of more than one fire every day in these buildings that house some of the capital's most vulnerable residents." It went on to say "Small fires can kill and soon develop into large fires unless they are stopped. Automatic fire suppression systems such as sprinklers can stop those small fires developing into tragedy. Sprinklers are the only

¹ NFCC, [Protection and building safety](#)

system which detects a fire, suppresses a fire and raises the alarm.”² This evidences the benefits of having sprinklers in a wider variety of buildings, both residential and commercial.

In its meeting on 7 March 2023, the Committee asked Deputy Commissioner Jonathan Smith for LFB’s views on the Government’s proposal, he said: “Sprinklers have been proven to [help] protect [the means of escape and suppress fires] time and time again and we welcome that introduction [for] care homes.” He went on to say that “we would like to see that introduced in schools as well” and “we see this consultation as being an incredibly important first step, but we would like to see that develop even more.”

The Committee also notes that the NFCC backs sprinklers and automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS) as an inherent part of building safety in its position statement on protection and building safety.³

Following the evidence the Committee has gathered, the Committee asks the Government to widen the requirement for sprinklers/AFSS to include schools as well as care home, and to address how their use could be required more widely in its response to the consultation.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Clarke', is positioned above the printed name.

Anne Clarke AM

Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee

² LFB, [Care homes fire risk revealed by LFB](#), 18 March 2018

³ NFCC, [Protection and building safety](#)