

FIRE SAFETY MEETING ON 30/07/2020

Present: Grace (Chair), Grazyna, Jos, Judith, Lana, Sabrina, Roger (Co-Secretary).

Officers: John Brett (Director Resident Safety), Susanne Afra (Head Capital Works).

AUTOMATIC OPENING OF AOVs - MANUAL OPENING OPTIONS

JB began by explaining the significance of the Notice of Deficiency (NoD) placed on an HLM block by London Fire Brigade (LFB) that includes the demand that roofs be locked against unauthorised access. Only Camden officials are authorised, not residents. LBC is legally bound to carry out this order from LFB, the enforcing authority.

In the event of a fire, the “Down and Out” policy of everyone evacuating by the front door is justified by:

- The stairwells being of concrete construction
- Fire Doors being fitted to all flats and, wherever possible, at the ends of corridors
- The latest alarm system being fitted, hard-wired and covering communal areas and all flats.

In addition, JB said that LBC would fit Automatic Opening Vents (AOVs) where the doors to the roofs are. These will open when the alarms sound and help to vent smoke from the stairwells. In so doing, they will provide residents with access to the roofs but strictly at their own risk. AOVs are not legally compliant as fire escapes; neither is the access to the AOVs by spiral staircases or many of the stairs currently in place.

Committee Members still felt that many residents, particularly those on upper floors, will be concerned about having to exit downwards into a smoke-filled stairwell. JB said that fire brigades always aim to fight fires at source which usually means within flats and entering flats causes smoke to escape into stairwells. However, this will be mitigated by:

- the AOVs and windows on the stairwells
- Fire doors wherever possible at the end of corridors to protect the stairwell
- the alarms giving residents ample time to evacuate
- the speed in which LFB can reach Holly Lodge - about five minutes.

Jos referred to the Hackett Report on the Grenfell fire which insisted that authorities listen more to the opinion of residents. Residents will be concerned that access to the roofs is locked. They will not necessarily be convinced that the AOVs will open in the event of a fire. It would be reassuring if there were some form of manual over-ride for opening the AOVs.

JB replied that this is ruled out by LFB’s NoD. However, when the AOVs do open in the event of a fire, there is no stopping residents exiting by the roof though this is counter to LBC’s advice. In the event of power failure, AOVs have battery backup.

Grace queried whether LFB were aware that there might be people on the roof. JB said they are but there is no reason why people should be and in doing so they could create further problems and risks to LFB personnel.

MAINTENANCE ACCESS TO ROOFS FOR RESIDENTS

Judith said it is necessary to allow residents access to the roofs in an emergency, such as flooding from the water tanks. This had occurred in her block and Camden were unable to send a plumber for several hours so residents took emergency action otherwise the whole block would have suffered flood damage. Both Grazyna and Sabrina agreed and cited similar experiences in their blocks.

JB said that Camden Repairs has been made aware of this concern and would put Holly Lodge on Priority Call, guaranteeing repairs in an emergency within an hour.

Committee Members, (with many years experience of Camden Repairs), were not reassured. *SA said she would get back to us on this.*

Lana came up with a solution whereby the AOVs can be opened by key pads; in an emergency Camden could give the code to residents over the phone enabling immediate access to roofs. *JB said he would suggest this to Camden Repairs but the policy at present is for professionals only to have access to utilities and plant on roofs.* He did not think LBC would change this, if only for H&S reasons.

As it is, the roofs need upgrading with higher railings on gantries and emergency lighting installed to make them safe for Camden operatives. JB confirmed that Camden will maintain gantries etc and add access buttons to the AOVs from outside on the roofs.

Judith, Grazyna and Sabrina pointed out how poor maintenance is on the roofs with guttering and hoppers not being unblocked for years, causing water to cascade down the sides of blocks and to stand on the roofs for weeks. This eventually leads to damp in flats and water ingress. Some blocks have annually cleared their own roofs because Camden has failed to do so. This useful activity will end.

JB said he would take this failure to maintain roofing to Andy Hardwick, Head of Operations and Repairs and put our request for a maintenance regime to Gavin Haynes.

AUTOMATIC CLOSING OF DOORS TO BLOCKS

Grazyna said she had been locked outside her block once when the door entry system failed and is concerned that exiting through the front door needed a button to be pushed. What is the guarantee that these electronic systems wouldn't fail in the event of a power cut or fire? JB said that during a power cut doors go into failsafe mode and will open.

Judith asked that Suket Patel be specifically tasked with checking pushbutton front doors operate properly.

OBJECTS IN CORRIDORS

Grace brought up the problem of residents' obstructions in corridors being a fire risk and evacuation hazard. *JB said that Camden intends to address this problem again in the autumn and could run the pilot project on HLE called "Clear Communal Area Policy".*

*JB mentioned that new legislation requires fire doors and/or front doors (?) to be checked annually/every six months (?). Lana suggested that Caretakers should check communal fire doors and enter the checks into a **Maintenance Log Book**. The Log Book would list their tasks and when carried out. It should be open to residents' scrutiny and comments.*

JB said that LBC is upgrading its Caretaking system and this could be suggested to Mary McGowan, Director of Housing. Grace said although the suggestion might have come from a TRA it should be carried out on a block by block basis.

LOCKING ELECTRICAL BOXES

Judith and Grace raised the problem that electrical cupboards can be locked preventing residents from reading their meters. *SA said that SP will not lock electrical cupboards if residents need access. JB said he would explore options.*

TIMETABLE

Grace asked about the timetable and SA said that fitting fire doors and alarms should commence early September after the leaflet is sent out. Roof access will be dealt with later after the HLRA AGM has given residents the opportunity to discuss the matter and after Camden's consultations have taken place.

Roger said that a vulnerable resident had expressed alarm at workmen being in her flat to fit the fire door. JB said that a full risk assessment would be carried and safety procedures put in place. It takes 3-4 hours to fit a fire door with its frame and only involves workmen being around the front door. However, if a resident is still very concerned, their door could be fitted later.

CAMDEN ACTIONS

- Key pads to AOVs?
- Confirmation that HLE on Priority Call with Camden Repairs
- Upgrading roofs including buttons outside AOVs for access
- Roof maintenance regime from Gavin Haynes and Andy Hardwick
- SP to check pushbutton access to front doors
- "Clear Communal Area Policy" to be piloted on HLE
- Maintenance Log Book to be suggested to Mary McGowan
- SP to keep electrical cupboards open if needed by residents and JB to explore optio