

Fire Safety in Islington

Frequently asked questions

Following the recent tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington, we want to let you know the steps we are taking to keep you safe, and to remind you of the fire safety advice from the London Fire Brigade.

We have produced this document to provide as much information as possible to residents and their representatives. We want to reassure you that resident safety is our number one priority and we are checking all our homes to make sure that any fire safety issues are addressed quickly and thoroughly.

The majority of council homes have up to date Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs). The council has spent £7m on fire safety works and another £38m of work is due to be completed.

These answers reflect the position on the date this document was issued (Friday 30 June), but advice from the fire brigade and government may change as a result of the investigation into the Grenfell Tower fire. The council will respond quickly and thoroughly to any of these changes.

A report on the actions taken so far is available from the committee meetings section of our website (<http://democracy.islington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=134&MIId=3131>)

Your questions answered...

Are there any blocks in Islington that are like Grenfell Tower?

Eight high-rise blocks in Islington have panel cladding. Tests have shown that the cladding on the shorter side walls of Braithwaite House in EC1 contain Aluminium Composite Material (ACM). ACM is the type of cladding used at Grenfell Tower and is thought to be linked to the spread of the fire there. The council's contractors started removing the cladding two working days after we got the test results back. The fire brigade has confirmed that residents are safe to stay in their homes while the cladding is being removed and we have arranged fire safety patrols day and night until the cladding is removed. The council and fire brigade are meeting with residents regularly to resolve any fire safety issues and concerns.

The cladding samples taken from buildings on the Brunswick and Harvist Estates have been found not to contain ACM.

General fire safety questions

What are the things most likely to cause fire in my home?

The Fire Brigade's *Fire Safety in the Home* booklet has lots of information about what causes fire and how to minimise the risk: www.london-fire.gov.uk/documents/FSITH_web.pdf

Also:

- Candles, incense and oil burners are one of the most common causes of fire in the home. Always keep an eye on them and keep them away from curtains, clothes, furniture and hair, which can catch fire easily.
- Don't leave cooking unattended.
- If you smoke, dispose of cigarette ends carefully. Don't smoke in communal areas or discard cigarettes from your windows.
- Keep balconies and communal areas free of clutter. The council will remove items in communal areas that cause obstructions.

There is no smoke detector in my flat, what shall I do?

- **Council tenants:** All council-rented homes should be fitted with a smoke detector when renovated or following electrical safety testing. If you do not have one in your home, contact Housing Direct on 0800 694 3344 and arrange for one to be fitted.
- **Leaseholders:** You will need to fit your own alarm. There is advice at www.london-fire.gov.uk/SmokeAlarms.asp
- **Private tenants:** Your landlord might be responsible for fitting a smoke alarm. Find out about your landlord's responsibilities and your safety at www.london-fire.gov.uk/RentingandSharing.asp.

Also:

Ensure your mains-powered alarm is working properly if you have one. If it does not work, or beeps constantly it needs to be checked, please contact Housing Direct on 0800 694 3344 to report it, if you are a Partners tenant call 0800 587 3595, if you own your own home or rent out your home get a competent person to check and repair it. **Do not disable it – it is there for your safety.**

What is the council's plan for a large scale fire?

The council has an emergency crisis response plan in place, which allows us to respond to a wide range of incidents including road or building collapses, fires, floods and anything that affects the community. If necessary, we have a pool of volunteers who can help and can call on other boroughs for mutual support. We also have arrangements with the Red Cross to help in an emergency. For more information visit

www.islington.gov.uk/about-the-council/emergency-planning-and-business-continuity/what-to-do-in-an-emergency

Questions about cladding

Is the cladding on my building safe?

There are many different types of cladding. After the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, the government has asked all councils to test samples of cladding on their buildings of six storeys and over, if an inspection shows that Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) may have been used. The tests will verify the materials used and whether they are safe for residents. The government has stressed that ACM cladding itself is not dangerous, but that it is important that it is installed properly to make sure high-rise properties are as safe as possible for residents.

We will let residents know the outcome of tests as soon as we are told, and we are sharing information with the fire brigade and government. If we find anything concerning, we will follow all London Fire Brigade advice to make sure residents are safe.

Test results showed that ACM cladding panels on Braithwaite House contained combustible material, and contractors started removing the panels two working days later.

We have put on hold all planned work to install insulation cladding on council properties. Work was planned on four blocks – Arlington House (low rise), Gambier House, Haliday House and Ilex House (all high rise). The tender did not specify ACM cladding.

Why is cladding used on council homes?

Cladding provides another layer of insulation, keeping heat in the building when it's cold and keeping the building cooler when it's hot. This keeps energy bills down. Some buildings have also been clad to protect the building's structure.

What is Aluminium Composite Material (ACM)?

Aluminium composite panels (ACP), made of **aluminium composite material (ACM)**, are flat panels consisting of two thin coil-coated aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core.

ACPs are frequently used for external cladding or facades of buildings, insulation, and signage, to protect walls and insulation from the elements.

Advice on what to do in the event of a fire

The advice in my block is to stay in my home in the event of a fire elsewhere in my block. Is it still safe to do this or should I leave my home?

Yes. This is still the London Fire Brigade's advice: see www.london-fire.gov.uk.

The London Fire Brigade are still advising residents in modern purpose built flats and mansion blocks where fire stopping arrangements are in place to stay in their homes if they are unaffected by smoke, heat and fire. Some older mansion blocks have been issued with alternative advice, which is displayed in communal areas. Modern purpose built blocks have been designed to contain a fire in the flat where it starts for between 30-60 minutes. However if you are affected by fire, smoke or heat and your exit is clear, you should leave the building.

I live in a street property or mansion block and have been told to leave the building if I become aware of a fire in another part of the building. Why is my advice different?

Most street properties have been converted from single houses into flats, and most mansion blocks are older properties. The flats in these properties may not contain fire as effectively as purpose built flats, and they tend to have fewer storeys, so there is different fire safety advice. It is safer to leave the building so the advice is to evacuate.

Please check the fire notices on display in your building and know the plan for getting out if there is a fire: www.london-fire.org.uk/know-the-plan.asp.

We are planning work to install linked smoke alarms and heat detectors in residents' homes and communal areas of our street properties and mansion blocks. We are also improving fire doors to improve separation between flats which will help hold back fires for longer. We will prioritise some higher-risk properties and will complete this work over three years.

IF YOU LIVE IN A MANSION BLOCK OR A STREET PROPERTY:

- Most importantly, make sure you **know what the plan is for evacuating your building** so you and anyone with you can get out safely.
- **If there is smoke or fire inside your flat or maisonette and your escape route is clear:** Get everyone out, close the door and walk calmly out of the building. If it is safe to do so, alert other residents in the immediate vicinity on your way out (knock on their doors). Call 999, give your address, the number of your flat, and say which floor the fire is on.
- **If there is a fire in another part of the building:** The emergency plan for your building is that all occupants should leave as soon as they become aware of a fire in the building. This information should be displayed in your building. Tell everyone in your home about the fire and get them to leave, shutting the flat door behind you. If it is safe to do so, alert other residents in the immediate vicinity on your way out - knock on doors. Call the fire

service. You must leave immediately if smoke or heat affects your home, or if you are told to by the fire service. If you are in doubt, get out.

I live in a tower block, how will I know if there is a fire in a flat on another floor?

The structure of your building – the walls, floors and doors - are designed to contain the fire where it has started for of 30-60 minutes protection, enabling you to remain in your flat while the fire brigade extinguish the fire. This is why there are not interconnected alarms between our flats. The advice from the fire brigade is that if there is a fire elsewhere in your building you are usually safer to stay in your flat unless the heat or smoke from the fire is affecting you, in which case you can leave via the stairs.

The London Fire Brigade fire safety assurance and advice for residents who live in tower blocks is:

- **Make an escape plan** and make sure everyone knows how to get out safely
- **If there is smoke or fire inside your flat or maisonette and your escape route is clear:** Get everyone out, close the door and walk calmly out of the building. Do not use the lift. Call 999, give your address, the number of your flat, and say which floor the fire is on
- **If there is smoke or fire inside your flat or maisonette and your escape route is NOT clear:** It may be safer to stay in your flat or maisonette until the fire brigade arrives. Find a safe room, close the door and use soft materials to block the gap to stop the smoke. Go to a window, shout “HELP, FIRE” and call 999. Be ready to describe where you are and the quickest way to reach you. Windows above the first floor are not considered suitable means of escape because of the risk of serious injury
- **If there is a fire in another part of the building:** The structure of your building – walls, floors, doors – are designed to give you a minimum of 30-60 minutes’ protection from a fire, to enable you to remain in your flat while the fire brigade deal with the fire. If there is a fire elsewhere in your building you are usually safer to stay in your flat **unless the heat and smoke from the fire is affecting you**, in which case you can leave by the stairs if it is safe to do so. If it is not safe to leave and you do remain in your flat call 999 and let them know which flat you are in.
- **If you are in communal areas of the building:** leave and call 999.

I’m in a high-rise building there is a fire in my property and my exit is blocked, should I use the window to escape?

The London Fire Brigade advice says that if there is a fire or smoke inside your flat or maisonette but your escape route is NOT clear:

- It may still be safer to stay in your flat or maisonette until the fire brigade arrives.
- Find a safe room close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke.
- Go to a window, shout “HELP, FIRE” and call 999.
- Be ready to describe where you are and the quickest way to reach you.

Windows above the first floor are not considered suitable means of escape because of the risk of serious injury.

My building has a single staircase; will I be safe if there is a fire?

Many residential tower blocks have just one staircase. Though many blocks like this were built in the 1950s this is still an acceptable method of construction now, under current Building Regulations.

The principle is that each flat forms a fire-resistant compartment to contain a fire, and the communal staircase is protected by fire doors to enable it to be used for a prolonged amount of time.

London Fire Brigade's safety advice for people living in a high-rise property remains unchanged. If the fire is not in your home, and there is a fire elsewhere in your building you are usually safer to stay in your flat unless the heat or smoke from the fire is affecting you, in which case you can leave using the stairs if it is safe. If it is not safe to leave, stay in your flat, call 999 and let them know which flat you are in.

There is no fire safety signage in my block, why not?

There should be fire safety signage in communal areas of your block, which you should follow. If there is no fire safety signage in your block, please contact your local Area Housing Office.

Keeping yourself and your family safe

How can I keep my home safe from fire?

Advice from the London Fire Brigade includes:

- Make sure you have plenty of smoke alarms inside your home and test them regularly.
- Some buildings have mains powered smoke/heat detectors. If you are a council tenant and have a mains-powered alarm which does not work, or beeps constantly, please contact Housing Direct on 0800 694 3344 to report it. If you are a Partners tenant please call 0800 587 3595. **Do not disable it – it is there for your safety.**
- Make sure bikes and rubbish do not block communal exits or your escape routes.
- Keep balconies free of clutter.
- If you smoke, dispose of cigarette ends carefully. Do not smoke in communal areas.
- Candles incense and oil burners are one of the biggest causes of fire within homes. Always keep an eye on them and keep them away from materials that may catch fire such as curtains, furniture, clothes and hair.
- Always make sure you have an escape plan in place and that everyone in your home knows what to do in an emergency.

There is more detailed advice on the London Fire Brigade website here: <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/staying-in-or-going-out.asp>.

Someone in my family has mobility issues and I live in a tower block, what should I do if there is a fire?

You can book a fire safety check with the London Fire Brigade, who will be able to give you tailored advice. Visit www.london-fire.gov.uk for advice for parents of young children and carers of elderly adults.

I am worried that my neighbour may be vulnerable to fire, what can I do?

If you know or work with anyone who may have an increased risk of fire, who is less able to react or has a reduced ability to escape in the occurrence of a fire, please encourage them to book a fire safety check. These may include factors such as being a smoker, a hoarder, having an alcohol dependency or having mobility issues. See www.london-fire.gov.uk for details. You can also tell the council if you are worried.

What can I do to keep my building safe?

Islington Council carries out regular routine inspections of all communal areas. The frequency of these inspections has increased and currently includes weekends. We aim to complete all repairs and estate management actions immediately. If you notice fire doors are damaged or do not work properly; if fire escapes are blocked, or if you are concerned that there is a build-up of flammable materials in communal areas or on balconies, please contact your local area housing office, Partners for improvement in Islington (if Partners provide your services) or Housing Direct on 0800 694 3344.

If you are a leaseholder and you sublet your flat, the London Fire Brigade's advice for landlords can be found at www.london-fire.gov.uk/landlords-or-housing-providers-know-the-plan.asp.

Fire safety assessments and processes

How does the council carry out Fire Risk Assessments (FRA)?

We carry out FRAs on some properties every year, and every property has an FRA at least every three years.

The Government sets out five steps in carrying out a fire risk assessment. These are:

1. Identify fire hazards - such as sources of ignition, fuel and oxygen
2. Identify people who are at risk – people in and around the premises and those especially at risk
3. Evaluate the risk of a fire occurring and the risk to people from fire. Remove or reduce fire hazards. Remove or reduce the risks to people, through:
 - a. Detection and warning
 - b. Fire-fighting
 - c. Escape routes
 - d. Lighting
 - e. Signs and notices
 - f. Maintenance.
4. Record significant findings and action taken. Prepare an emergency plan. Inform and instruct relevant people. Cooperate and coordinate with others and provide training

5. Keep assessment under review and revise where necessary.

What are the fire safety requirements for tall blocks?

FRA's are required by law. The FRA enables the responsible person (in the case of council estates, this is the council, as the landlord/freeholder) to look at the fire safety measures required. We check the common parts, and consider the implications for residents in flats. The FRA is a living document which is only valid for a certain period of time. Some blocks are checked every year, and every building is checked at least every three years.

Can I have a copy of the Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) for my block? Will these be put online?

Yes. You can request it from your Area Housing Office or Partners, if your property is managed by Partners, or you can email firesafety@islington.gov.uk. We are looking at putting these online but there are about 2000 separate assessments and this will take some time. However, we can email these upon request.

We will also put the register of FRA's online soon to let residents know when their last FRA was carried out.

How often is a FRA carried out?

Some blocks are assessed every year and all are assessed at least every three years. Local Area Housing Office Staff carry out regular inspections including fire safety issues. The council's fire safety arrangements are also monitored by the Homes and Estates Fire Safety Board, which meets quarterly and is attended by the London Fire Brigade. We work closely with the fire brigade and meet regularly with them.

There is restricted access to my block for emergency vehicle and it worries me that the fire brigade will not be able to access my building?

We are in regular touch with the fire brigade on all properties where there is restricted access. You may want to request a free fire safety check from the fire brigade for your home. Visit www.london-fire.gov.uk/HomeFireSafetyVisit.asp or call 0800 028 44 26.

Detecting fires

Why do Islington blocks not have fire alarms in them?

We do not have communal alarms in our blocks, but most high-rise blocks and other blocks have hardwired smoke detectors. The council's street properties and mansion blocks are constructed differently and from November 2017 we will be installing hard wired smoke and heat detection alarms over the next three years. All individual flats should have working smoke and/ or heat detectors. Fire alarms can also be confusing for residents in buildings where the advice is to stay in your flat if you are unaffected by flames, heat or smoke from a fire.

Why aren't there fire marshals in my building?

We do not train residents to be fire marshals as there is no expectation that residents should be responsible for firefighting. If there is a fire, please follow the fire safety advice for your home and call the fire brigade on 999.

If a property is owned by a leaseholder are they required to have a smoke alarm?

By law, Since October 2015 private landlords have to install smoke alarms in rental properties and could be fined up to £5,000 if they do not. However leaseholders who live in their own homes are not legally required to install smoke alarms, but the council strongly recommends and encourages leaseholders to do so. This is highlighted during the Right to Buy process.

I am a homeowner in a council block. Am I responsible for fire safety?

Yes. You need to ensure the front door to your property meets regulations and also carry out regular gas and electricity checks. When the council fits new doors in your block you can buy one at cost price. You can see more information on the London Fire Brigade website www.london-fire.gov.uk. Please be aware that if you fail to fit a proper door you are putting yourself and your neighbours at risk and the council may take action.

Fire protection

Will the council be installing any sprinkler systems?

Current building regulations do not require the retro-fitting of sprinklers during refurbishment or other building works. We have installed sprinkler systems in a number of properties of particularly vulnerable residents.

However, Islington Council is now actively looking at whether it is possible to retrofit sprinklers in our tower blocks. We are also trying to understand the cost of fitting sprinklers, and how effective they would be in improving safety. Our residents' safety is our top priority and we will do what it takes to keep them safe.

How do dry risers protect my block in the event of a fire?

Dry risers do not contain water if they are not being used, but are charged with water by fire services pumping appliances when necessary. 123 council properties have dry risers. We test and inspect them twice a year in accordance with British Standards.

Should my block have a wet riser?

Wet risers are permanently charged with water. The fire brigade advise that buildings above 50m tall need wet risers, to provide an immediate supply of water high up if there is a fire. We are currently converting dry risers to wet risers in our two tallest blocks. Michael Cliffe House will be converted at the end of June, and Peregrine House will be converted by the end of 2017.

Is my flat front entrance door safe?

All front doors should meet a minimum standard of fire resistance and should be fitted with a self-closing device. We have checked 28,000 front entrance doors, including 8,000 leaseholder properties. We have done work on 12,000 properties, including 2,000 renewable doorsets. Homeowners are responsible for ensuring their front doors meet these requirements. Our homeownership team can advise on getting checks done. Please be aware that if you fail to fit a proper door you are putting yourself and your neighbours at risk and the council may take action.

Why are there no fire extinguishers in communal areas?

We do not provide portable fire extinguishers based on guidance given to landlords by fire authorities and guidance published by relevant fire safety standards. Provision is not related to costs or cost saving.

Manufacturers, the fire service and fire safety guides all provide a clear message – that only people who have been trained should attempt to use portable firefighting equipment. There are many different types and using the wrong one could make a fire worse. We do not provide training to residents and there is no expectation that residents should help put out fires. If there is a fire, untrained people should make sure they are safe, and call 999.

Any resident can choose to buy portable firefighting equipment to use in their own homes. If you do, we encourage you to carefully read the instructions and to never take risks in a fire situation.

Have recent refurbishment works compromised fire safety?

We check to make sure refurbishment works do not compromise fire safety. A health and safety representative attends pre-construction meetings. A Clerk of Works inspects projects during and after the work is completed. Where appropriate Building Control will inspect and sign off works.

Does the council monitor contractors to ensure they don't disturb fire protection arrangements?

Please see the answer above.

We are also writing to everyone who has submitted a major planning application in the last 15 years to remind them about their responsibilities around fire safety, and advising them to tell us if they have made any alterations to external cladding or other significant alterations.

Does my block have emergency lighting when the main power supply goes down?

16 blocks have emergency lighting fitted as part of our fire safety works programme. A further £38m of fire safety work is programmed-including installing new doors and improving emergency lighting. Residents will be informed of proposed emergency lighting prior to any works commencing on site.

Working with the council to keep you and your neighbours safe

The council is cracking down on things which could compromise fire safety. Please do as we ask, we are trying to keep you and your neighbours safe.

Why is the council asking me to move my bike/pram/belongings?

In line with advice from the London Fire Brigade, we are making sure fire doors and exit routes on our estates are not blocked as this is a fire hazard. If you do not remove your belongings, we will attempt to discuss the issue with you in person or put a notice on any items that are causing an obstruction, giving you 24 hours to remove them. However depending on the risk and location of items these may be removed sooner and without notice.

Failure to comply with our advice may lead to us taking legal action and could lead to you losing your home if you are a tenant or leaseholder.

Why is the council asking me to clear my balcony and areas outside my home?

The London Fire Brigade has advised that we make sure balconies and communal areas are free from flammable materials, as this is a fire risk. It's also worthwhile checking items you may have in storage cupboards on communal landings to ensure that any combustible materials are removed.

Residents are also advised not dry clothes, rugs, bedding or towels over the side of balconies or in communal areas.

If we don't receive residents' full co-operation with our fire safety advice, then we may consider taking legal action. Please remember this advice is in place to keep you and all our other residents safe.

Thank you. We hope that this document has answered any questions you may have. If you would like any more information, please contact firesafety@islington.gov.uk.