



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

The Rt James Brokenshire MP
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Dear John,

Building Safety Programme: Stay Put Policy

During today's Urgent Question on tower blocks with dangerous cladding, you raised questions about fire and rescue service advice on 'stay put' policy and the advice to building owners and residents in circumstances where 'stay put' policy was suspended.

'Stay put' is an operational policy overseen by fire and rescue services. The National Fire Chiefs Council has issued a statement on this, which can be found at:

<https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/News/national-fire-chiefs-council-reiterate-stay-put-advice/200686>

Existing advice on the policy and guidance about its suspension in certain circumstances is annexed to this letter and can be found on the National Fire Chiefs Council website at:

<https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Simultaneous-evacuation-guidance>

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Government worked with fire safety experts, including the National Fire Chiefs Council, to issue advice to owners of high rise residential blocks of flats with unsafe cladding on the immediate steps they should take to mitigate the risks of fire and maintain the safety of their buildings for residential use, pending full remediation work. This advice has been supported by fire and rescue service inspections of all buildings identified as having unsafe cladding.

To support that advice, the National Fire Chiefs Council issued more detailed guidance to fire and rescue services and building owners on the arrangements that should be in place where a 'stay put' policy has been suspended. That guidance was issued in October 2017. The National Fire Chiefs Council published an updated version of the guidance in May which did not alter the existing position on the maintenance or suspension of 'stay put' policy.

Decisions on maintaining or suspending the 'stay put' policy in blocks of flats should be based on a comprehensive risk assessment undertaken by a competent fire risk assessor. Residents and the local fire and rescue service should be informed where an existing 'stay put' policy is suspended.

This Government is committed to ensuring that buildings are safe and that residents feel safe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', is written over a faint horizontal line.

RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP

ANNEX: Simultaneous evacuation guidance

Guidance: to support a temporary change to a simultaneous evacuation strategy in purpose-built blocks of flats

In early October 2017 the National Fire Chiefs Council published 'Waking Watch/Common Fire Alarm' guidance, to provide advice to building owners, their professional advisers and Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) to support a temporary change to simultaneous evacuation.

Following a commitment to review the guidance after six months, in February 2018 the National Fire Chiefs Council invited user feedback and held a workshop with external stakeholders to assess if the document is still fit for purpose. The guidance has undergone some amendments based on stakeholder feedback to make it clearer and more user-friendly.

The new version - published today - is titled 'Guidance: to support a temporary change to a simultaneous evacuation strategy in purpose-built blocks of flats'. This document replaces the original Waking Watch guidance published in October 2017.

It is to be used where a decision has been made to adopt such a strategy - based on a comprehensive risk assessment - carried out by a competent person.

The main edits are:

- Amendments to clarify and highlight the intention that a Waking Watch is only a short-term solution and a fire alarm system should be installed if the risk cannot be removed quickly
- There is further guidance on the information a competent person should consider in a risk assessment.
- To clarify that the risks to persons should be considered regardless of whether the building is above or below 18m in height.

NFCC supports the principle of a Stay Put strategy whenever possible, as it has been proved over many years to be safe for residents of purpose-built blocks of flats. NFCC believes that a Stay Put strategy is the correct advice in a purpose-built block of flats that is built and maintained correctly. In a building that was originally designed for a stay put policy, a change to simultaneous evacuation should only be temporary until the risk has been removed.

This guidance applies to premises in England and Wales. It was produced to support FRSs, building owners/responsible persons and associated fire safety specialists, including fire risk assessors.

This guidance is applicable to buildings which have been fitted with an external wall system which failed the large-scale tests commissioned by the then Department for Communities and Local Government (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) following the Grenfell Tower fire, carried out at the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

Although written for those responsible for the safety of residents in purpose-built blocks of flats, the principles of this guidance may, in certain circumstances, be applied to other premises.

NFCC supports the 'Fire safety in Purpose Built Block of Flats' guidance hosted on the LGA website and developed by a wide range of stakeholders. The guidance remains appropriate for all purpose-built blocks of flats.