

PE1719/E

COSLA submission of 14 August 2019

I refer to your letter of 7 June 2019 regarding the above. COSLA has recently responded to the consultation on Fire Safety in High Rise Buildings and feel it helpful to share the agreed position of COSLA's Community Wellbeing Board as follows:

Communication of Advice and Information

1. Information has to be available in the languages of all occupiers of high-rise domestic buildings, otherwise there is a risk that some may not have access to key safety information. It is important that this is regularly updated to ensure that the materials in the information address the needs of all occupiers.
2. If this can't be achieved easily, pictorial advice would be of value, recognising gender balance and ethnic issues in the imagery used.
3. It cannot be assumed that all occupiers will want, or be able, to access safety information via a website, so it is important to ensure that alternative options are available to meet all needs. Communications and advice are only useful in this context if accessible to all.

Common Areas

4. COSLA supports further communications for high rise domestic building residents on the negative impact of materials stored in common areas. Information should be provided when each occupier moves into the high-rise building. We would agree that there is a need for regular SFRS home safety visits and advice can and should be reinforced through local resident groups.
5. COSLA agrees that the guidance is made available to owners, factors and the other categories highlighted in the consultation question 17.
6. As far as the guidance is concerned, even if for the categories set out in Q 17(of the consultation), this should be accessible to all those residents in the high-rise domestic buildings as well, with links available to web-based versions, as well as a master copy in each building, where possible. Advice in the guidance should include what support is available for vulnerable residents, for those with disabilities or age-related difficulties. This should extend to a strategy to deal with those residents, whose first language is not English.

Risk Management – assessing the risk to persons

7. COSLA would agree that there is a need for regular Fire Risk assessment in high rise domestic buildings, as understanding the needs of residents is important in designing risk management measures. However, if councils were to be asked to undertake that work, then, if not already funded for such measures, that funding would need to be made available.

Risk Management – preventing fires

8. Any guidance or communications material should include advice on how to prevent fires in high rise domestic buildings, but residents should not be expected to undertake the role of firefighter. Guidance should include advice on avoidance of storing combustible materials in parts of the building where emergency exit is vital to all residents.

Risk management - physical fire safety measures

9. As well as improving communications and guidance, every floor of a High-Rise building should be regularly checked to ensure that information on physical fire safety measures is available. In reference to earlier comments on other languages, this should include means to contact SFRS/landlords/factors, if vulnerable or disabled, to ensure records are up to date in the event of a fire.

The law on fire

10. It would be useful to have references to legislation, but in doing so the language used needs to be understandable to all that have access to the guidance.

I trust that the response above provides the committee with a clear indication of COSLA's views on this matter. While this does not answer specifically the views of the petitioner, the COSLA position sets out clearly that we view the safety of the tenants/occupiers of high rise flats to be of great importance and that the measures set out in our response will go a considerable way to maintaining that safety.