

PE1719/C

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service submission of 17 July 2019

Thank you for seeking the views of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) in respect of Public Petition PE1719, which is currently being considered by the Public Petitions Committee - *Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the current 'stay-put' policy as it applies to the fire strategy for existing multi-storey residential buildings.*

SFRS Position

Following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire, the SFRS has remained fully committed to working with partners to learn any lessons and wherever possible to make safe buildings even safer for residents of high rise domestic premises.

We are participating in the Scottish Government's Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety where, as part of this process, the advice provided to residents in relation to fire and stay put guidance is being consulted upon.

SFRS has for many years, supported the current position of promoting that residents in high rise domestic buildings remain in their flat where they are unaffected by a fire incident within their building unless directed by firefighters or the police to evacuate. This is reflected across the UK, with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) publishing a [Stay Put Position Statement](#) on their website. All UK Fire and Rescue Services support the principles of stay put, albeit with some minor variances in terminology.

Construction of High Rise Domestic Buildings in Scotland

The principles of stay put are set within the context of wider inherent fire safety measures provided within high rise domestic buildings to secure the safety of those resorting to them, including compartmentation of the building and suitably protected means of escape.

The construction of high rise domestic buildings in accordance with relevant standards should ensure a fire within a property is contained without the need to consider full evacuation. In the very few incidents that can result in other areas being affected, such as through the passage of smoke, partial evacuations can be undertaken in a controlled and successful manner. This strategy is not solely related to high rise domestic buildings, but also reflected in premises that provide care such as in care homes and hospitals.

The principle of containing a fire to a localised area for a period of time for it to be dealt with by the Fire and Rescue Service, without the need to unnecessarily move unaffected people, is effective within the arrangements established by the regulatory framework relating to building construction and fire safety.

Any alterations to high rise domestic buildings must be supported by a building warrant that should ensure the inherent fire safety measures provided within the building are maintained or indeed improved. Such requirements are reflected within the Scottish Building Standards system and associated Technical Handbooks. These measures

include specific protection of the means of escape and the compartmentation of the building and individual flats, which prevents the spread of any fire that occurs.

It should also be noted that where a fire has any potential to breach a localised flat or compartment, the progressive compartmentation will continue to resist any fire or smoke spread and SFRS will take this into account when considering any potential or need for progressive evacuation.

Current standards require that any new build high rise domestic buildings have sprinklers fitted, with additional requirements being proposed in the revision to the standards from October this year.

SFRS continues to regularly inspect high rise domestic buildings in Scotland on a quarterly basis, reporting any fire safety concerns to those responsible for the premises. These are known as Operational Intelligence visits, and are carried out under Section 9(2)(d) of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005. Through this inspection program, our personnel ensure that equipment used in the event of fire, including firefighting lifts and where provided firefighting lobbies, remain effective and operationally ready for use.

During these visits, crews will endeavour to identify any additional concerns that affect fire safety and report these back to those with relevant responsibilities. Whilst SFRS remains the enforcing authority for ensuring measures provided for the use by or the protection of firefighters are maintained in an efficient and working order, inherent fire safety measures such as fire doors, flat entrance doors, detection where fitted, or glazing protecting escape routes are all enforced by Local Authority Building Standards departments.

SFRS' Operational Response to Fires in High Rise Domestic Buildings

SFRS frequently attends fire incidents in high rise domestic buildings, with nearly all of these resulting in a swift and safe resolution where most residents of the building may be unaware that a fire has occurred. Operational procedures, including support from our Operations Control Room personnel, who advise and give guidance to residents on any actions to take, are well tested and result in minimal disruption to residents during any incident.

Current operational guidance provides contingencies for Incident Commanders to notify residents to remain in their property, prepare to evacuate, or commit additional resources to assist with any evacuation in affected areas where the situation requires it. In many instances informing all residents in a high rise domestic building of a fire within a contained area, be it a flat or a floor, would be detrimental to both the operational procedures adopted to deal with that incident and the safety of residents.

At each incident the SFRS undertakes a measured assessment to determine the appropriate action and whether additional measures are required to warn and inform residents, or commence evacuation. These procedures have been adopted for some time, and on occasion where deemed necessary given the operational circumstances of an incident, and in the interests of the safety of residents, a partial or full evacuation can be implemented and completed successfully.

Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety

The Ministerial Working Group has already made a number of recommendations in relation to fire safety within high rise domestic buildings in Scotland, including the areas highlighted below.

The provision of information in relation to the stay put guidance is currently being considered through Scottish Government's *Strengthening Fire Safety for High Rise Domestic Buildings Consultation on Guidance for those responsible for Fire Safety in High Rise Domestic Buildings and Information for people who live in High Rise Domestic Buildings*.

The development of information for residents of high rise domestic buildings in Scotland that clarifies and refreshes existing guidance is being undertaken in collaboration with the SFRS, and a number of other bodies including Tenants and Residents' Panels.

In summary, considering current evidence available within Scotland, SFRS continues to support the stay put guidance issued to residents in nearly all our high rise domestic buildings, and will consider any findings that arise when current discussions and engagement concludes.

I trust the above is helpful to the committee. If any further information is required, please do not hesitate to contact me.