



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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Dear Martin,

“Stay put” policy in high rise apartment buildings

On behalf of the whole Committee, may I first take the opportunity to thank the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for its part in the ongoing campaign to protect public health to keep services going, and to look out for vulnerable people especially, during the current Coronavirus-19 outbreak. We also hope SFRS staff and their families are keeping well.

It cannot be “business as usual” at the Local Government and Communities Committee – we are operating within the same public health restrictions as society in general, meaning that we cannot currently meet as normal – but we remain open and listening, and keen to hear from any stakeholders at the front line of the current crisis, including the SFRS, in relation to matters in our remit, concerning local government, housing, planning and communities.

However, my main reason for writing to you relates to the SFRS’s general “stay put” advice in relation to outbreaks of fire in higher rise buildings. A petition from Rachel Gibson on behalf of tenants of Cartcraigs Road, Glasgow was referred to the Committee last November: a history of the petition’s consideration in the Scottish Parliament can be found in the clerk’s paper available via this link: https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Local_Gov/PUBLICpapers20200228.pdf

The Committee is grateful to the petitioner for bringing to our attention the legitimate concerns high-rise residents feel about fire safety, especially in the light of the Grenfell tragedy. We understand that residents often want reassurance that policies to deal with fire outbreaks in high-rises real time are robust and will actually work in their own

living environment, and also that there are clear, understandable and practical alternatives in place to deal with circumstances where compartmentation is breached and evacuation becomes necessary.

When the Committee last considered the petition, at our meeting on 4 March, we were content to close it. This was on the basis of advice from the Scottish Government that a “Stay Put technical steering group” had been set up recently at UK level, that it would oversee comprehensive research on means of escape, and that the SFRS would be sighted on, and to some extent, involved in, this workstream. We also note, and appreciate, that dealing practically with fire outbreaks is considered an operational matter for firefighters, although there is clearly a strong public interest in having the issue aired from time to time.

In closing the petition we did agree to write to the SFRS. This would be with a view to receiving—

- an update on SFRS policy in relation to policy on fire outbreaks in high rises, in the light of lessons learned from Grenfell (we appreciate this is an ongoing process, with the inquiry continuing and good practice also continuing to evolve), and
- an outline of the extent of the SFRS’s involvement in the new steering group and its views on whether the group will help ensure that evidence and research-based best practice will be followed on dealing with outbreaks in high rises.

I would be most grateful for a response from the SFRS on these points. I am mindful that you will have other priorities at present. To that end, I’d be grateful for a response by 30 May: do please feel free to contact the clerk if you consider you may require more time.

It may be helpful to add that, whilst the petition has now been formally closed, the petition retains a general watching brief in relation to building standards and fire safety post-Grenfell, and your response would contribute to that work. More information on our work in this area can be found here:

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/103439.aspx>

Yours sincerely

James Dornan MSP

Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee