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Sent via email to:

LocalGovernmentandCommunities@parliament.scot

Dear James,

Thank you for your letter dated 3rd April 2020 and your recognition of the support Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) personnel are providing to the NHS and their local communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1719

In relation to you seeking a further update from the SFRS in respect of our previous response to Public Petition PE1719, which had been 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

The construction and design of multi-storey residential buildings in Scotland, including the inherent fire safety measures within high rise domestic buildings provides the context for the "stay-put" policy.

In considering our position around "stay put" the SFRS has undertaken extensive intelligence gathering through our Operational Assurance visits in conjunction with the Scottish Government High Rise Inventory process. As a result, "stay-put" remains the primary advice of the SFRS to residents of high rise domestic buildings in the event of fire, and underpins the initial tactical considerations that the Service adopts for dealing with any such incidents. These tactics include containing a fire to a localised area for a period of time for it to be dealt with by the SFRS, without the need to unnecessarily move unaffected people.

A review of historic fire incidents within high rise domestic buildings confirms that this category continues to represent only a small number of overall dwelling fires (approx. 17%) and of these incidents, nearly 50% result in no fire damage. Whilst statistical data on fire spread is difficult to analyse within this building type only, 8% of fires spread out with the room of origin and less than 1% beyond the floor of origin.

SFRS has reviewed and is currently refreshing its well-established procedures to consider any potential for unexpected fire spread within high rise domestic buildings that will ensure the safety of residents is maintained. These procedures include managing any potential for a change from "stay-put" to a staged or partial evacuation of the building and, in the unlikely event it may be required, a full evacuation. This has been supported by an amendment to the relevant Technical Standard to require evacuation alert systems to be installed in new high rise domestic buildings.

The Service continues to engage with our colleagues and services across the UK through the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) network, that has dedicated working groups looking at all aspects of this including further research into fire behaviours in such buildings, occupancy movements, fire safety standards and the training of operational personnel. One such group entitled the “Stay Put Steering Group” has been commissioned by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, NFCC and the Home Office to undertake operational research and interaction with the “stay put” policy. Information from these groups, alongside our local intelligence regarding multi-storey residential buildings, will inform our ongoing consideration of the “stay put” policy. Where information suggests that “stay-put” may not be appropriate, SFRS will review all available information and engage locally with residents and those responsible to ensure their continued safety.

Our engagement with NFCC continues through a fortnightly “Metro High Rise” meeting which addresses technical, operational and legal matters specifically in relation to multi-storey residential buildings across the UK. In addition, SFRS is represented on a recently established NFCC “Enforcement Working Group” which includes consideration of fire safety measures in high rise domestic buildings. The SFRS is also represented on the NFCC “Tall Buildings” and “Stairwell Protection” groups that support development of our service delivery tactics.

A policy review group has been established within the SFRS to undertake the ongoing review of our standard operating procedures in relation to high rise buildings. This will take account of outcomes or recommendations arising from further phases of the Grenfell Inquiry and NFCC National Operational Guidance such as technological advances enabling full and/or partial evacuation.

Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety

As you will be aware, SFRS participated as a key member of The Ministerial Working Group which produced a number of recommendations, the outcomes of which include:

- Guidance issued to all residents of multi-storey residential buildings supported by a targeted publicity campaign;
- Introduction of specific guidance for those responsible for such premises entitled “Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats” including information on fire safety risk assessments;
- Introduction of guidance relating to “Fire safety in specialised housing”;
- Guidance for the storage and removal of combustible material in common areas; and
- Revision of the Scottish Building Standards Technical Handbook to include evacuation alarms for new high-rise buildings.

Following on from the Ministerial Working Group, a further group has been established by the Scottish Government entitled “Grenfell Inquiry Fire Safety Working Group”. This group will consider further recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 report. SFRS will continue to be represented on this group which will support future development of policy and procedures within the Service and allow us to contribute from a technical and operational capacity to influence appropriate outcomes in Scotland.

SFRS have established a cross functional working group to critically analyse the 46 recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the 13 London Fire Brigade internal recommendations. Delivery of the resultant action plan is being monitored through the SFRS governance arrangements and reported to the Grenfell Inquiry Fire Safety Working Group. Whilst work on this will be ongoing for some considerable time due to the Inquiry, actions taken to date include reviewing our provision of fire survival guidance, our evacuation protocols at incidents, training and joint exercising arrangements and further development of our joint working arrangements at such incidents.

In summary, SFRS continues to support the “stay put” guidance issued to residents wherever appropriate and will consider any information or findings from current workstreams and review our strategies accordingly.

I recognise the worry that the tenants of Cartscraig Road, Glasgow have expressed and also their legitimate concerns about fire safety, especially in the light of the Grenfell tragedy. I also recognise that in responding to your request in the way that I necessarily have, I have, to my mind, provided a level of reassurance that we have and are continuing to respond to the recommendations arising out of Grenfell in both a UK wide and Scotland specific context. However, to high-rise residents, they may consider this to be similar to the way that London Fire Brigade may have responded post-Lackanall house. Therefore, if you think that there is any tangible way that the SFRS can provide further reassurance to these residents, then please do ask me.

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

Yours sincerely

MARTIN BLUNDEN
CHIEF OFFICER