

Tenant-Led Scrutiny Report Number 8



Executive Summary



Overview

This scrutiny exercise was produced by the Tenant-led Scrutiny Pool known as SIFT (Scrutiny, Involvement For Tenants) supported by an Independent Tenant Advisor.

The second topic chosen by SIFT to scrutinise was 'What role do tenants and leaseholders play in helping to keep high-rise blocks safe from fire?'

The purpose of the exercise was to:

- To explore what activities tenants and leaseholders are asked to undertake in terms of fire safety
- To identify the policies and procedures in relation to fire safety that residents are aware of
- To assess how YHN measure activity
- To recommend changes to policy and practice where required

Methods used to Scrutinise the Service

The methods used on this scrutiny included:

- Briefing by service head
- Visits to high-rises
- Work Shadowing
- Briefing by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service
- Resident activity
- Desktop review of policies, procedures, complaints, comments and a log of fire incidents.

The customer engagement findings include:

- Customer engagement opportunities at present are not regular enough

Residents of certain blocks have a good relationship with the Compliance Officer and feel comfortable approaching him with their concerns

- Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service have not held any events in high-rises in the city this year. The TWFRS Prevention and Education team have held some events, but not the Fire Safety team
- Customers have expressed concerns that when reporting fire safety issues, they are made to feel like a 'nuisance'
- Customers themselves have recognised the difficulties to get residents involved in engagement activities.

Additional findings include:

- There are sufficient safety measures in place to prevent a serious fire from originating in the bin chute stores and spreading
- Smoke detectors in the corridors are not linked to the enquiry centre
- The biggest fire safety risks at present are accidental and deliberate fires and mobility scooters are the most significant emerging risk.

SIFT's customer engagement recommendations are:

- The current Customer Engagement structure should be reshaped to increase the frequency of contact with residents of high-rise blocks
- A range of activities including some hands-on tasks such as fire behaviour training should be made available with the aim of boosting the number of customers engaging, to promote awareness and discussion around fire safety
- Placing notices in blocks, Homes and People and on social media to promote customer engagement around fire safety.

Our additional recommendations are:

- Investigations should be made with the relevant contractors so the smoke detectors in corridors are linked to the enquiry centre
- Offer help to residents to replace equipment that could pose a fire risk
- A lettings policy/risk assessment for those moving into high-rise blocks should be created and implemented
- Plans should be looked into and ideally set into motion to remove mobility scooters being stored in locations that could pose a risk to personal and building safety
- Documents used by staff on tenancy sign up should include more questions to risk assess those moving into high-rise blocks
- YHN should look into offering an annual service check on mobility scooters of residents in high-rises
- Investigations into the cost of an annual scheme where residents can dispose of unwanted goods free of charge or at a low cost to help eliminate clutter and possible hoarding.

The full report details the findings and recommendations of this scrutiny exercise, which took place during September to November 2019. The report can be accessed through our website at www.sift-newcastle.org.