

high-rise news

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High-rise news - fire safety special edition

You will be aware of the tragic loss of life following the Grenfell Tower fire in London. Our thoughts and sympathies go to all those affected.

There has been much discussion in the press and on TV as to what happened and how it could have been prevented. There will be a full investigation into how this tragedy occurred, and we will work with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to make sure any relevant recommendations are implemented in Gateshead.

I want to take this opportunity to reassure all our residents that we have a close working relationship with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to keep our customers safe.

Since the fire at Grenfell Tower we have met with the fire service and Gateshead Council to review fire safety in our multi-storey blocks.

This newsletter gives you an update on the current measures we have in place, what you as a resident can do, and what we are doing next.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Mallen-Beadle', is written over a white background.

Jon Mallen-Beadle,
Managing Director of
The Gateshead Housing Company.

Putting your safety first

Fire-risk assessments are carried out at all of our multi-storey blocks. Each risk assessment considers the potential fire hazards and what we are currently doing to reduce that risk. It also identifies any additional action that may be necessary.

In the last six years we have spent over £5.8m on fire-safety measures to protect residents and their homes. This programme of work has involved inspecting, maintaining and repairing all multi-storey blocks to ensure that fire-stopping measures are fit for purpose. Service routes have been checked and smoke and heat seals fitted or reinstated to doors in service areas and in residents' homes. The scope of this work was agreed with Tyne and Wear Fire Service.

In addition to the physical protection, the Caretaker Service plays a key role in helping to keep your block safe. Caretakers carry out a range of inspections and tests, reporting any defects immediately.

This includes:

- A daily inspection of communal areas as part of their cleaning duties
- Weekly fire alarm tests
- Monthly Fire and Health and Safety inspection of the block
- Separate spot checks by Caretaker Supervisors
- Checking that all fire exits are operational and clear of debris and obstructions
- Monitor any contractors in the building doing works and report on any unsafe practices
- Report any issues within communal areas and corridors that could be deemed a fire or health and safety hazard
- Meet with all new tenants and provide fire safety advice.

We operate a "stay put" policy in the event of a fire. The measures we have outlined above are designed to contain a fire for enough time to allow the fire service to attend and put out the fire.

What can you do?

As a multi-storey resident you and your visitors also play a vital role in keeping the block safe.

- Don't store flammable materials (eg large amounts of paper) in your flat or communal areas
- Keep corridors and communal areas free of any personal belongs
- Don't block window vents or hang curtains over communal windows
- Don't leave rubbish for collection in communal areas
- Don't wedge fire doors open – they must remain closed to prevent the spread of smoke and fire
- Only put out bulky items on the day of collection – this includes putting large items outside the block
- If you see any damage to any part of the building report it immediately to the Caretaker
- Make sure that you and your visitors don't block external access areas for the emergency services. These areas are indicated by yellow hatching or the words 'KEEP CLEAR' on the road surface.

What happens next?

We can already confirm that none of the multi-storey blocks in Gateshead have the same cladding used at the Grenfell Tower block.

Any improvement work that is being carried out in multi-storey blocks or is in development will be assessed to ensure that there is no increased fire risk as a consequence of this work.

Specifically:

- We are currently installing external insulation to Fell, Lough, and Beacon Courts. The insulation board being used is non-flammable.
- Work planned for Regent Court (new district-heating system, window replacement and a new façade) is still in the design phase. Before starting work the contractor and Gateshead Council will commission independent expert advice, to ensure fire safety is not compromised.
- Work planned for Acomb, Bedale, Ripley, Willerby, Barford and Stretford Courts includes new heating systems, and window and roof replacements to improve the energy efficiency of the blocks. There are no plans to install cladding. This work is also still in the design phase, and before starting work the contractor and Gateshead Council will commission independent expert advice, to ensure fire safety is not compromised.

We will continue to keep residents updated. In the meantime, if you have any further concerns or questions, please email the Multi-storey Team at operationalsupport@gatesheadhousing.co.uk or call 0191 433 5370.

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