

1. Background

Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, commissioned in the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy, highlighted the importance of meaningful engagement with residents. An existing approach to resident engagement characterised by "*ignorance*" and "*indifference*" was highlighted.

In July 2019, Chelmer Housing Partnership, Stockport Homes Group and Your Homes Newcastle were selected for a Best Practice Group within the MHCLG Building Safety Programme. The Group was to carry forward recommendations in Chapter 4 of the Hackitt report, testing ways to ensure residents' voices are heard and understood to help shape national fire safety policy.

2. Aim of research

The group's specific focus was "information and understanding"; exploring how residents in social housing want to receive fire safety information and how they process and understand key messages. Three areas were considered.

- Which are the most effective communication methods for residents?
- Which format was suitable to provide concise and quality information?
- Who did residents regard as the "trusted voices" to communicate fire safety?

3. Methodology

The group and residents co-designed an infographic about fire safety, which was approved by regional Fire Services. A sample of residents was contacted by each landlord and asked five short questions (see **Appendix 1** for further details).

1. *How do you prefer to be contacted about fire safety?*
2. *What do you do to reduce the risk of fire in your home/property?*
3. *How often do you test your smoke alarm/detector(s)?*
4. *If you had questions or concerns about a fire risk in your neighbourhood/block, e.g. a fire door open, rubbish or a mattress left in communal areas, how would you report it?*
5. *Do you feel confident that INSERT LANDLORD listens to your concerns about fire safety?*

To establish a baseline of resident fire safety knowledge, in the first survey residents were asked what measures they took to reduce fire risk in their homes.

Participating residents were then provided with a fire safety infographic, the format of which varied by landlord (email, text, letter or poster). Stockport Homes used the resident's preferred contact method, Chelmer Homes used mainly paper based communication due to the older demographic in its sheltered housing and YHN divided its blocks into groups of three, and gave a different format to each.

A few weeks later, the same residents were asked the same questions about fire safety knowledge to assess whether seeing the infographic had increased the number of safety measures they identified in response to question 1. The impact of different

communication formats on resident confidence and ability to recall information was also noted. Where no response was received to the second contact, SHG and CHL used alternative contact methods to increase response rates. YHN approach is included in Appendix 2.

Landlord	Number of properties in pilot	Number of responses to survey 1	Number of responses to survey 2
Chelmer Homes	900	595	369
Stockport Homes	1,719	582	225
Your Homes Newcastle	3,400	526	276

Residents involved lived in high rise blocks and sheltered accommodation. SHG recorded demographic information which showed an even spread of responses from across age groups.

Chelmer Homes contacted 764 residents in sheltered accommodation, receiving a 66% initial return and 41% subsequently. For tall buildings, 52% responded from 176 contacts, then 32% in the second survey.

Stockport Homes targeted 1,719 high rise properties across 22 blocks. 582 people (34%) of residents completed the first survey, 225 (13%) of these completed the second.

Your Homes Newcastle focussed on 3,400 residents living in high rise blocks. The 42 blocks were split into three groups of 14. A total of 582 people took part initially, with representation from all 42 blocks and 276 completed the second survey.

4. Main findings:

- Residents' knowledge of fire safety measures in the home improved overall across the three providers as a result of the infographic provided to them.
- All three providers found letters had the most positive impact on knowledge and understanding of fire safety in the home, regardless of any stated communication preference by the resident.
- Chelmer saw a 66% increase in awareness between the surveys for letter recipients, YHN 26% and SHG 27%.
- Information communicated by letter is most readily retained, and posters in communal areas (over 33% of SHG residents recalled these and 62% of CHP residents) or letters through doors (almost 41% of SHG residents recalled these) are the most visible, as more residents remembered seeing these than an email or text. For YHN, letters improved positive behaviour change by 26%, more than email or poster, but posters were more visible (89% recalled seeing the poster).

- The most trusted source of fire safety information was the Fire Service and landlord. Confidence in the landlord increased as a result of the infographic by 25% for Chelmer Homes' residents, by almost 17% at SHG, and 11% at YHN.
- Only 66% of Chelmer residents knew about the 'stay put' policy, whilst 69.5% of SHG tenants were aware. YHN's "*If in doubt, get out*" policy was known by 83% of respondents.

5. Implications for policy-making:

In spite of the increased use of digital communication in most aspects of daily life, pictorial and paper based communication had the most impact on resident knowledge and confidence around home fire safety. A reliance on digital dissemination is therefore unlikely to be the most effective way for policy makers to engage with residents and effect positive behavioural change.

The positive regard with which residents held the Fire Service and their landlord demonstrates that these are key trusted channels for engagement. By creating a simple, eye-catching joint infographic, increased levels of awareness were achieved for minimal resources. This could easily be rolled out by other bodies.

6. Next steps

It appears more traditional methods of communication should be retained alongside digital to ensure the full demographic of residents is reached.

When landlords put resources into meaningful engagement, knowledge and confidence amongst residents seems to increase. The involvement of residents in the working group was an important first step towards embedding this, but must now be translated into a genuine commitment by landlords of all tenures to listen to and act upon residents' views about fire safety in their own homes.

The three landlords involved in the pilot have all used their learning to shape resident involvement in decision making about fire safety and during Covid-19 restrictions.

YHN are starting a targeted communications and engagement project about all elements of high rise living, including fire safety. Their tenant-led Scrutiny Panel also completed an investigation into '*what role do tenants and leaseholders play in helping to keep high-rises safe from fire?*'.

Chelmer contacts its most vulnerable customers on a very regular basis, especially around how to prevent fires and what to do in case of a fire. The other feedback from the project has led to a new deep dive into all areas of fire safety.

The learning will be disseminated amongst regional groups of housing providers, through sector bodies such as TPAS and NHF and via digital promotion. Other organisations within the Best Practice pilot are now using the infographic for their own blocks.

Appendix 1

Fire Safety in Your Home – Survey 1

Following the Grenfell Tower fire, we are working with customers and other social landlords to improve fire safety. We would like to find out what you know about fire safety, and have a quick survey for you which should take approximately three minutes to complete.

In a few weeks, we would like to send you some information about reducing fire risks in your home. We would then contact you again to see how useful you found this information.

By completing the surveys and agreeing to receive the fire safety information, you would be entered into a prize draw to win one of three fantastic high street voucher prizes of £250, £150 and £75!

If you do not want to receive further information about fire safety in your home please email customer.engagement@stockporthomes.org or call 0161 218 1091.

***1. If you are happy to complete the two surveys and be entered into the prize draw please complete your contact details.**

Name:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Address:

2. How do you prefer to be contacted about Fire Safety?

Poster in foyer of your block

Text

Email

Post/Letter

***3. What do you do to reduce the risk of fire in your home/property?**

*** 4. How often do you test your smoke alarm/detector(s)?**

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

Never

Landlord (someone else) does it for me

Other (please specify)

***5. If you had questions or concerns about a fire risk in your neighbourhood/block, e.g. a fire door open, rubbish or a mattress left in communal areas, how would you report it ?**

*** 6. Do you feel confident that Stockport Homes listens to your concerns about fire safety?**

Yes

No

Don't have any concerns

Other (please specify)

How we use this information

The questions about fire safety will be used to help us understand the best ways of sharing fire safety information with tenants. A summary of all the completed surveys will be reported anonymously to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. Any personal details will remain confidential and only be used by Stockport Homes.

Fire safety in your home – Survey 2

Thank you for taking part in the first ‘Fire safety in your home’ survey.

Recently we put up fire safety posters in your block. We want to know how successful this has been as a communication method so we can report back our findings to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who we have been working with. This is why some of the questions may seem similar to the last survey you completed. Thank you for your help.

1. Have you seen the “Fire safety in your home” poster?

Yes or No

If yes how did you receive it or where did you see it?

- Email
- Text
- By hand
- In the post
- I saw it on the digital screens in the building entrance

Having seen the information you were sent

2. What do you now do to reduce the risk of fire in your home/property?

3. How often do you test your smoke alarm/detector?

Possible Categories

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Never
- Landlord (someone else) does it for me
- Other _____

4. Do you feel confident that your Landlord listens to your concerns about fire safety?

- Yes
- No
- Don't have any concerns
- Other _____

Thank you for completing the second part of the fire safety survey. In order to be entered in the prize drawer to win up £250 of love2shop vouchers please complete your details below.

Name:	
Phone number:	
Email:	
Address:	

Appendix 2

Your Homes Newcastle has 3,400 customers living in high rise blocks. More than 500 people took part in this research, with representation from all 42 blocks. The 42 blocks were split into three groups of 14.

Each of the three groups received the same information, communicated by a different method. The intention was to measure if the different method of communications influences participant recall around fire safety. One group of blocks were given a letter, one an email and one a poster, all with the same fire safety information. The three groups were kept separate to avoid crossover of communication methods and to make sure the results accurately reflect the impact of the individual communication method.