

Sheffield City Council – Action to Take in the Event of a Fire Study Executive Summary

Sheffield City Council has agreed to help facilitate some of this research by carrying out a set of surveys to look at residents understanding of what to do in the event of a fire and how that might be improved by using different channels or styles of communication.

Key Findings

- Initially, respondents were less confident that they would know what to do if there was a fire in their flat and they didn't have a clear escape route, however the knowledge assessment suggested that scenario 3 (where there is a fire elsewhere in the building) was more of a much weaker area.
- The control group improved in their assessment of what to do in scenario 1 (there is a fire or smoke inside your flat and your escape route is clear) in the follow-up survey compared to the first survey. The reasons for this are not clear, but it could be that the initial survey prompted them to consider the issue in the intervening period.
- There were significant increases in the understanding of the respondents in the leaflet group over how to respond in scenario 2 (there is a fire or smoke inside your flat and your escape route is not clear) and scenario 3 (there is a fire in another part of the building, but not inside your flat).
- There was also a significant increase in the number of respondents matching the London Fire Brigade (LFB) guidance for scenario 3 in the video group.
- The previous two findings listed suggests that the additional guidance seems to have been most beneficial in situations where the residents would not be advised to leave the building.

Implications for Policy-Making

- The creation of block specific fire safety written guidance / handout for residents should be seen as good practise
- Housing organisations should consider providing regular guidance to residents about what they should do in an emergency and how they can plan for emergency situations such as fire and flood to improve awareness. This could be through annual visits, newsletters, briefings at resident meetings, video message boards in blocks.
- Consideration should be given by local fire brigades to produce guidance similar to the LFB – trust in “local” emergency services may be beneficial to the effectiveness of the message
- Further research with BME groups would be helpful to establish the most effective methods of improving understanding is recommended. Levels of literacy amongst this group do vary and written material may be less effective.
- Rescue services should be prepared for residents not remaining in situ and plan their rescue accordingly
- Given the common behaviour of residents in scenario 3 would be to get everyone out, organisations should consider installing audio equipment that can be triggered remotely in the event of an emergency to give clear advise to residents.

Next Steps

- Further analysis of data set to establish if there are differences between different groups in understanding across the scenarios
- Share the project and findings with our High Rise Resident Group
- Share the project and findings with Sheffield Landlords Group
- Produce block specific fire safety information with the input of the High Rise Resident Group and SYFRS
- Discuss with SYFRS what information / resources is available for residents and what we can collectively do to promote fire safety understanding in the city.

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Overview

The Government has launched several studies to improve how landlords communicate fire safety information to residents living in blocks of flats. Sheffield City Council has agreed to help facilitate some of this research by carrying out a set of surveys to look at residents understanding of what to do in the event of a fire and how that might be improved by using different channels or styles of communication.

The results will help shape Sheffield City Council's and the Government's future strategies on communicating fire safety information to residents.

Methodology

Sheffield City Council asked a number of Sheffield residents living in council housing or student accommodation (targeting those living in high rise flat blocks as well as council sheltered housing tenants) to complete two surveys as part of the study. Targeted emails were sent to these residents providing them with information and a link to part 1 of the survey. The survey questions were based upon the same questions used by Optivo so responses could be compared if required.

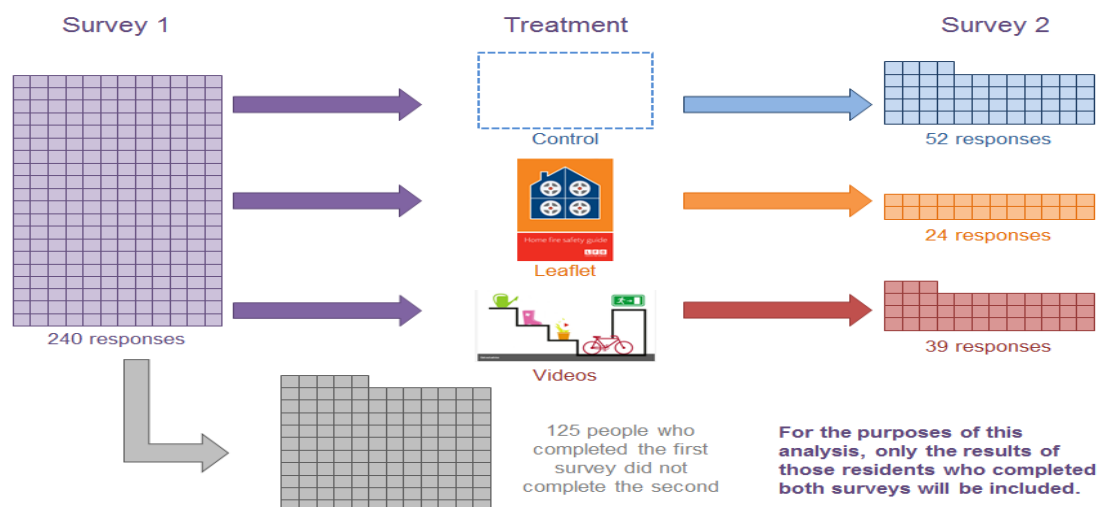
The purpose of the surveys were to find out about resident understanding of fire safety evacuation procedures for their accommodation and to evaluate what are the most effective ways to communicate information about what to do in the event of a fire.

Upon completion of the first survey, participants were then sent an email that included a link to either:

- a leaflet explaining what to do in the event of a fire;
- two short videos explaining what to do in the event of a fire;
- none of the above (control)

They were then asked to complete the second survey the following week. The leaflet and videos have been produced by the London Fire Brigade.

A total of **240** responses were received for the first survey, with **115** of these completing the second survey

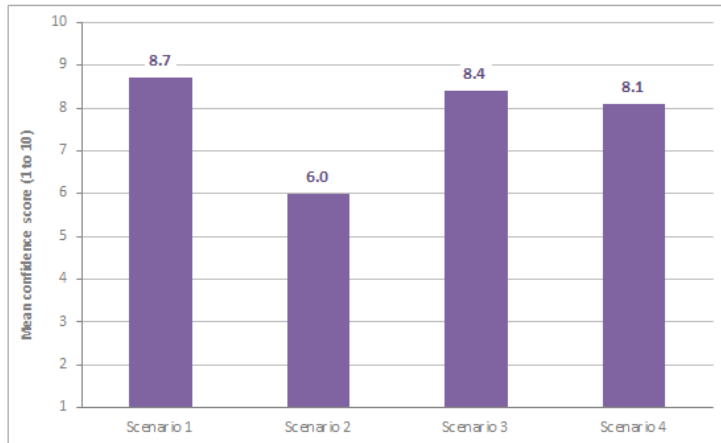


Main Findings

a) Confidence Levels

Participants were asked about how confident they understood what to do in 4 scenarios:

- **S1:** You're in your flat. There is a fire or smoke inside your flat. Your escape route is clear
- **S2:** You're in your flat. There is a fire or smoke inside your flat. Your escape route is NOT clear
- **S3:** You're in your flat. There is a fire in another part of the building, but not inside your flat
- **S4:** You're in the common parts of the building e.g. a stairwell/hallway. There is a fire in another part of the building



- The scores for all but scenario 2 indicate a high degree of confidence from the respondents*.
- The scores for scenario 2, where the escape route from the flat is not clear, are significantly lower than for the other three scenarios.

* Reminder: only the results of the 115 residents who completed both surveys are included in this analysis.

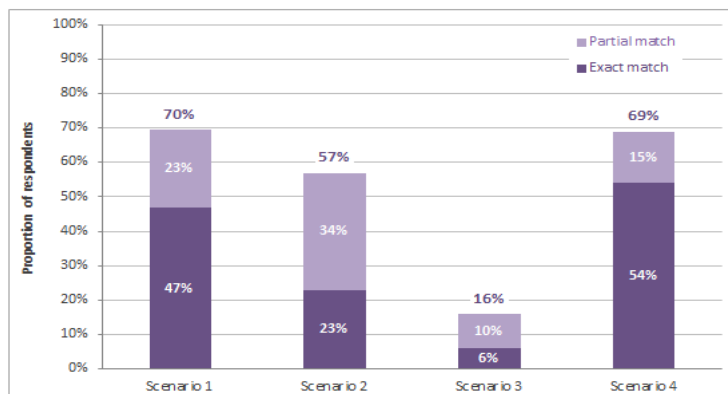
b) Knowledge

Participants were also asked what actions they would take for each of the 4 scenarios (**Call 999; Get everyone out, close the door and walk calmly out of the building; Use the lift; Stay put; Find a safe room, close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke; and Go to a window and shout "HELP, FIRE"**)

All respondents

Question: What would you do in each of the scenarios?

Comparing the responses to the advice from the London Fire Brigade (LFB)



- Despite having relatively high confidence that they would know what to do in scenario 3 (fire in another part of the building whilst they are in their flat), only 16% of respondents selected the options that at least matched the main advice from LFB – i.e. to stay put.
- 68% of the respondents said that they would "Get everyone out....." in scenario 3.

c) Change in Confidence and Knowledge Levels

Control Group

- There was a significant increase in the proportion of people in this group who exactly matched the LFB advice in scenario 1 in the knowledge assessment questions between the first and second surveys.

- No statistically significant difference was seen in responses (for all scenarios) pre and post intervention for the control group in terms of the proportion of people who at least partially matched the LFB advice.
- There were no significant differences in the confidence scores pre and post intervention

Leaflet Group

- The reported confidence of respondents when considering scenario 2 increased significantly post intervention in the leaflet group, with an increase from 6.2 to 8.4. This was supported by a significant increase in the proportion of people matching the exact LFB advice for this scenario (29pp increase).
- There was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of respondents matching the LFB advice for scenario 3 (both exactly and partially).

Video Group

- As with the leaflet group, there was a significant increase in confidence with regards scenario 2 post intervention with the video group, however this was not mirrored in the results for the knowledge assessment, although these started from a much higher base than the leaflet group (38% compared to 15%).
- Also in line with the leaflet group, there was a significant increase in the proportion of people who at least partially matched and those who exactly matched the LFB guidance for scenario 3 (i.e. to stay put).
- Although there was a noticeable increase in the number of people correctly matching the LFB guidance in scenario 1, this did not hit the threshold for significance, possibly due to the small sample size.

Effectiveness Impacts

- Just over half of the respondents from the first survey did not complete the follow-up survey, which reduced the sample size.
- A larger sample size would have been advantageous, however it appears that the provision of the written guidance from LFB was the most effective in terms of getting the advice across to the residents involved.
- It is not clear whether those respondents in the leaflet group were simply more likely to refer to the literature when completing the follow-up survey or whether they had committed the information to memory.