

# The Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group: Final Report

March 2021



**Victoria Elvidge - Chair**

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## Introduction from the Chair



I was delighted to be invited to chair the Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group (the 'Group'). The tragedy at Grenfell Tower, brought into sharp focus how important it is for residents in social housing to be safe from the danger of fire in their homes.

Many social landlords have good mechanisms in place for engaging with their residents about fire safety, and over the last eighteen months the Group has sought to build on the existing good practice in the sector. However, it is evident that there is a variance in how social landlords promote fire and building safety information, and how effective engagement is with social residents.

Over the last eighteen months I have learnt a great deal from the Group about what effective resident engagement looks like. It is clear to me that a one size fits all approach does not work. Personalised communication that considers the resident's needs and the type of their home is key. Bespoke information taking account of individual residents is particularly important when communicating guidance about evacuation procedures. The need for landlords regularly to repeat fire safety information to residents has been highlighted. The importance of building trust with residents also helps, to maintain the safety of their homes. I have seen the importance of landlords listening to the voice of residents when designing engagement strategies, and the even greater benefits that co-design with residents brings to both residents and landlords.

The Group has also pinpointed a number of areas that we believe need to be looked at in the context of Fire and Rescue Services Advice. These include: balancing resident's rights with landlord's obligations to undertake fire safety work and applying consistent approaches to fire safety messaging throughout the country.

The Group's presentation in October 2020 to the Industry Safety Steering Group, which is chaired by Dame Judith Hackitt, demonstrated the significance of the Group's work in bringing resident's voices into the conversation on fire and building safety. Dame Judith gave evidence to the MHCLG Select Committee that she had *"heard today from the best in class on engagement with residents and it's all positive so the role models (for culture change) are there for the others to follow"*. The intention is that the work of the Group will be considered by all landlords and building managers, and not just those in the social sector. The members are already using a range of methods to share their approaches to resident engagement, as a step towards delivering real culture change. The products of the Information and Understanding, and Landlord and Residents Responsibilities sub-group have been shared widely across the social sector and with The Association for Residential Management Agents (ARMA).

The principal aim of the initiatives trialled by the Group was to help to ensure that all residents both feel safe and are safe in their homes, giving all residents a stronger voice and better information about measures that affect this safety.

I believe that strong resident engagement is pivotal in enhancing homes, lives and communities. The value is not just financial (although engagement and cooperation do make for financial efficiencies) but in helping all householders, not just homeowners, to feel that where they live is their own home. I have therefore found it very reassuring to see progress being made on the Building Safety Bill, and Government's commitment to listening to residents and improving building safety. I am particularly pleased that the work of the Group is named in the [social housing White Paper, The charter for social housing residents](#), with a commitment in Chapter 1 to, 'Build on the work of the Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group, supporting the development of statutory and good practice guidance on engaging residents in all tenures on safety issues'.

Leading a group that is underpinned by these principles has been my absolute pleasure, and I have been struck by the commitment and dedication shown by each of the resident and landlord members of the Group and their determination and enthusiasm to progress and develop the work. The best resident engagement requires creativity, energy and dedication and they have all demonstrated this. The members have devoted far more time and energy to the project than they expected, and on an entirely voluntary basis, particularly for the residents. Their proactive sharing of skills and ideas has enhanced both the initiatives and the extent to which their outcomes can be applied more widely. The work has benefited hugely from the collaboration of different types of housing providers, each bringing different experiences and perspectives. I am also extremely grateful for the spirit of openness and cooperation shown by the members.

I would like personally to thank the residents and landlords that so effectively reflected all that is positive in the social housing sector and the two fire and safety experts who supported the Group: Tim Birchall, Fire Safety Technical Officer for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Paul Overall, the then Chief Executive of the Local Authority Building Control. I would also like to thank the National Fire Chiefs Council leads in supporting the Group in refining their work. I have worked closely with MHCLG throughout the project to ensure that the Group has received the right level of support. I have been impressed by the commitment shown by MHCLG and Home Office officials (especially Sarah Carpenter) to support the Group and facilitate the progression of the Group's work.

This final report, commissioned by Kit Malthouse in his then role as Minister of State for Housing, draws together the Group's findings, highlights the lessons learned and sets out the recommendations made by the Group.

Group members have been responsible for developing the three themes they have focused on and the products they have used to conduct their studies. They have full ownership of the work and will continue to explore ways to share their findings across the sector and beyond.

**Victoria Elvidge**

**Chair**

## Executive Summary

[The Social Sector \(Building Safety\) Engagement Best Practice Group](#) (The Group) was established on 21 March 2019 with eight social landlord and eight resident members. The Group reflects Government’s commitment to empowering social residents and ensuring that homes are safe. It delivers on a commitment made in the [social housing Green Paper, ‘A new deal for social housing’](#), to “establish a pilot with a small group of social landlords who would innovate and trial options for communicating with and engaging with residents on safety issues”. The Group also supports the Government in taking forward the recommendations in Chapter 4 of Dame Judith Hackitt’s [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#); to give residents a stronger voice in an improved system of building safety following the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

The members were selected following a competitive expression of interest and reflect different geographical bases, with a range of social landlords. Group members identified three key themes to improve resident and landlord engagement around building and fire safety, and co-designed a series of studies, the outcomes of which are intended not only to benefit residents and landlords in the social sector but also to be applied more widely across other tenures. These were practical pilots, testing specific approaches in different areas, organisations and contexts. They were not intended as formal research, but as a means of identifying potential options to explore further. We have particularly appreciated the contribution made by resident volunteers over the twelve months of the pilots.

Theme	Led by
<b>Information and understanding</b>	<a href="#">Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP)</a> <a href="#">Stockport Homes Group (SHG)</a> <a href="#">Your Homes Newcastle (YHN)</a>
<b>Landlords and residents’ responsibilities</b>	<a href="#">Clarion Housing Group (CHG)</a> <a href="#">Poole Housing Partnership (PHP)</a> <a href="#">Phoenix Community Housing (PCH)</a>
<b>Action to take in the event of fire</b>	<a href="#">Optivo</a> <a href="#">Sheffield City Council (SCC)</a>

### Theme 1: Information and Understanding

**Overview:** *Exploring how residents in social housing want to receive fire safety information and how they process, understand and trust key messages*

Group members tested whether providing a fire safety infographic by letter, email or poster was the most effective in improving resident’s awareness, understanding and recollection of fire safety information and whom residents trusted to provide the message (***a printable version of the infographic is included with Annex A***).

Residents that participated lived in high rise blocks and sheltered accommodation. A survey of 870 participants concluded:

- Personalised letters had the most positive impact on the study participants' knowledge, understanding and recollection of fire safety measures in the home, regardless of any stated preference of communication method by the resident. CHP saw a 66% increase in awareness of fire safety measures, SHG saw a 27% increase and YHN saw a 26% increase.
- The most trusted source of fire safety information were the local Fire and Rescue Service and the landlord. Perceived confidence in the landlord increased following the infographic being provided, by 25% for CHP participants, 17% by SHG and 11% by YHN participants.
- Displaying an infographic, endorsed by the Fire and Rescue Services, in communal areas increased participants' awareness and recollection of fire safety measures by 60% at CHP, 33% at SHG, and 89% at YHN.

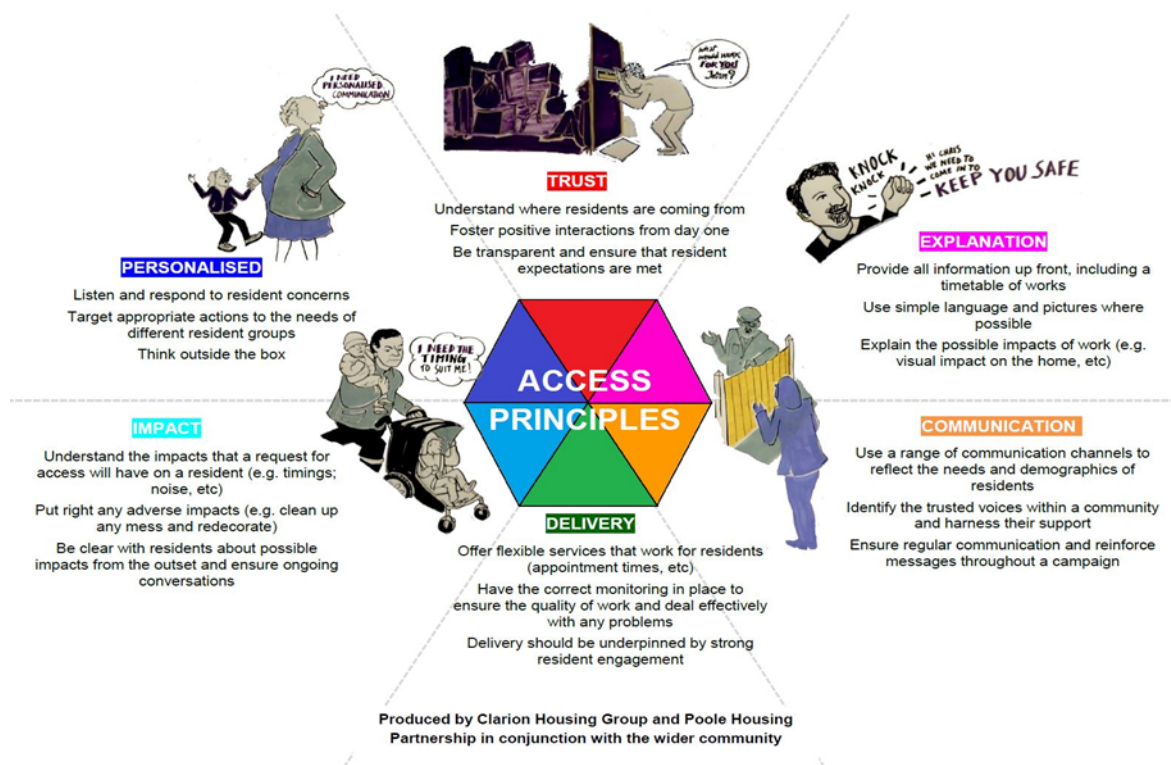
## **Theme 2: Landlord and Residents Responsibilities**

**Overview:** *Identifying the most successful ways to gain access to residents' home in order to carry out fire safety work. Including the specific concern of engaging with residents who are harder to reach and engage with.*

Group members used a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods as well as working outside of the industry to identify best practice in gaining access to resident's homes, involving 515 participants in the studies.

The sub-group produced the Access Principles Hexagon below to illustrate the key success factors that they identified through their work (***a printable version of the Access Principles Hexagon is included with Annex A***):

- Building trust with residents;
- Providing a clear explanation of why access is needed;
- Using effective communication methods;
- Delivering the service well;
- Understanding and mitigating any factors impacting on the resident; and
- Using a personalised approach based on the above; and



### Theme 3: Action to Take in the Event of a Fire

*Overview: Testing social residents' likely adherence to evacuation guidance and to what extent this might be improved by the provision of written guides or animated videos.*

Residents were drawn from a cross-section of housing tenures comprising general needs, sheltered and student accommodation. A survey of 340 participants concluded:

- Written advice and videos were equally effective in improving residents' understanding of what to do in the event of a fire.
- More participants (up to 25% depending on the scenario) say they would follow the London Fire Brigade's advice having seen its written guide or videos.
- Roughly 40% of participants say they would still evacuate in the event of a fire elsewhere in their building while they were in their flat, which is contrary to the London Fire Brigade's advice. This is in response to questioning, not a real-life situation.

**The complete sets of findings supporting the work of each sub-group can be found at Annex A.**

## Key drivers for successful resident engagement

The Group found that key drivers for successful resident engagement around fire and building safety are:

- Recognising that one size does not fit all, engagement needs to be tailored to residents needs and the type of home they live in.
- Consideration of residents' different learning styles and preferences when developing approaches to convey fire safety messages and evacuation procedures. A range of messaging and communication channels should be used to ensure disengaged and harder to reach residents can access fire safety information.
- Reminding residents repeatedly of the recommended course of action to be taken in the event of a fire. This could be through annual visits, newsletters, briefings at resident meetings or video message boards in blocks.
- Recognising that trusted partners, particularly the Fire and Rescue Services, are important in successfully communicating safety messages.
- Facilitating a positive environment for open and honest engagement.

## Recommendations of the Group

**Recommendation 1:** For the Government, in conjunction with NFCC and other key stakeholders to review and set out a consistent approach to national fire safety messages, particularly the language used around the 'stay put' messaging. The stay put strategy needs a similar campaign as the Government led Fire Kills, Smoking Kills and Five a Day campaigns which have proved to be successful, through the provision of a simple clear message of important information. A similar campaign would enable landlords, residents and Fire and Rescue Services to be cohesive and clear in their approach without ambiguity or interpretation. Further research into how residents apply / take on the fire safety messages from landlords and the Fire and Rescue Service and behave in the event of a fire would inform the campaign.

**Recommendation 2:** Government should establish stronger sanctions for tenants and leaseholders who do not provide details of key health and safety requirements within their property which might impact on the safety of their building, or do not provide access for the purpose of assessing such compliance.

**Recommendation 3:** Housing providers with high rise residential blocks or those deemed high risk should consider as part of their fire risk assessment and safety case, the retrofitting of BS 8629 Evacuation Alert systems. This will allow the Fire



and Rescue Service, to send an evacuation signal, to residents in the event of a fire, when the Incident Commander believes stay put is no longer a viable option. Any housing provider that intends to use such a system, should inform their local Fire and Rescue Service.

**Recommendation 4:** The sector should conduct further research into tailored messaging, focusing on different demographic groups. It should carry out further research to ensure that all groups with protected characteristics<sup>1</sup> are supported by landlords to achieve effective access to properties and have key fire safety information communicated to them. This could be undertaken in conjunction with Fire and Rescue Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4>

## Background

The Group is comprised of eight social residents and eight social landlords and supported by two building safety experts. The Group was formed to harness existing good practice in the social sector, and create an environment to give residents a voice in trialling innovative approaches towards communication with their landlords, on issues of fire and building safety. The intention is that the outcomes will improve engagement between social residents and landlords, and deliver change in advance of fire and building safety legislation coming into force. Government formed the Group to inform recommendations to ministers, based on the lessons learnt by social residents and landlord members about good practice when engaging on fire and building safety issues. The work of the Group has been developed and is owned by the landlord and resident member's organisations.

The [Building Safety Bill](#) makes provision for a new Building Safety Regulator which must consult a residents' panel before issuing guidance on residents issues. The work of the Group will be an excellent resource for the residents' panel to draw upon in guiding the Regulator on residents' issues.

The Group, which held its first meeting on 29 April 2019, was established following:

- extensive discussions with social housing residents across the country to understand their experiences of living in social housing following the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, where Ministers heard how residents and their landlords do not always engage effectively on building safety;
- the publication on 17 May 2018 of Dame Judith Hackitt's [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#) which called for the Government to give residents a stronger voice in a reformed regulatory system for building safety and support the creation of a 'national culture of engagement for residents of all tenures'; and
- the publication of the [social housing Green Paper, 'A new deal for social housing'](#) on 14 August 2018, which committed to establish a small group of social landlords to work closely with residents to trial innovative ways of communicating and engaging with each other on building safety issues. This commitment was echoed in the Government's [Building a Safer Future Implementation Plan](#) in December 2018, which set out the response to Dame Judith Hackitt's recommendations.

Members of the Group responded individually to the [Building a Safer Future consultation](#) published June 2019, which sought views on proposals for a radically new building and fire safety system based on the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt's report. [Government's response](#) to the '[Building a Safer Future consultation](#)' published on 2 April 2020 reported that the overwhelming majority of consultation respondents agreed that residents should be empowered partners in

the more stringent regulatory regime. They also supported proposals to ensure that residents are better able to challenge where they feel building safety is not being properly managed.

Over the last eighteen months, the Group has defined the focus and scope of its work and carried out a series of practical studies. These have tested different approaches to improving engagement on safety issues and they have helped to draw out lessons and good practice for other residents and landlords.

**The Group's Terms of Reference are set out at Annex B and details of the membership are set out at Annex C.**

## **Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of the Group was to help to identify and test how social landlords and residents can best work together, specifically on fire and building safety issues, in ensuring that homes are and remain safe to live in and residents are better informed, empowered and more engaged.

The principal aims of the Group include:

- To give residents a voice in designing and trialling initiatives, aimed at both improving landlord and resident engagement, and also at communicating information about fire and building safety.
- To use the outcomes in order to identify promising approaches for landlords and residents to work together in making and keeping buildings safe; and in doing so encourage a stronger culture of engagement.
- To contribute to the development of Government policy to ensure that residents are at the heart of the new building safety framework; and
- To consider how their approaches to resident engagement can be disseminated across tenures, as a step towards delivering real culture change.

The members of the Group trialled a series of initiatives that they designed to provide examples of effective resident and landlord communication, on fire and building safety matters. From the outset the members of the Group worked closely and collaboratively to develop clear objectives and tangible outputs. The early findings of the Group have informed Government's policy development on resident responsibilities, for example, in helping to determine the appropriate balance between the rights of residents and their corresponding obligations as occupants of high-rise residential buildings.

The work of the Group has included valuable site visits, enabling them to become familiar with some of the landlord members' fire safety remediation work. This provided some valuable context to the work of the Group.

A survey of the Group showed that both the landlord and resident members have felt supported, and valued throughout the project. It also highlighted the benefits

that the collaborative nature of the project has brought to their work. The members shared some helpful suggestions about improvements that could be made. These are included in the Lessons Learnt section of this report.

***“I think that being a resident rep on this Group has shown that the Government is committed to the inclusion of ordinary residents, and it also shows that the way forward is in encouraging landlords to work in a collaborative partnership, it reassures people that action is being taken and the people that need to listen, are.”***

**David Burbidge, Resident, Clarion Housing Group**

An important focus for the Group has been to ensure that the interests of social residents remain central and that residents of social housing are thoroughly and genuinely represented in this work. Feedback has been sought from the residents throughout. The positive response has confirmed their feeling of involvement and that they have felt empowered and engaged by membership of this Group.

***“I have gained a real insight into building safety and have used my knowledge to speak to other residents about their understanding of fire safety. My practical knowledge of living in a high-rise block for over 15 years has contributed to the pilot and I have felt that my input has been valued and influenced how the project has been planned to ensure residents’ needs are considered.”***

**John Cairns, Resident, Stockport Homes**

They have been instrumental in developing the work of their sub-group and have been at the heart of designing the initiatives. The Group’s ways of working have empowered the residents and enabled their voices to be heard, allowing them to influence decisions that affect their lives.

***Being a member of the Group inspired one of the residents to suggest to their landlord setting up a befriending service to support fellow residents in response to Covid-19. There are currently 25 befrienders, each calling between 5 to 10 people a week and the numbers keep growing.***

## Themes and Findings

Further details of the sub-group's findings can be found at Annex A

The Group members identified three main themes which highlighted areas that required effective engagement between residents and landlords on fire and building safety.

Social landlords of different size, type, location and stockholdings were brought together to help ensure diversity within the initiatives and to encourage peer review, support and challenge. While the range of locations where the members are based created a broad spread of data being gathered, it also presented some challenges such as in arranging face-to-face meetings. The flexibility and dedication of the sub-groups in overcoming these challenges has been very impressive.

### Theme 1: Information and Understanding

*Led by Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP), Stockport Homes Group (SHG) and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN).*

**Aim:** Explore the most effective way to provide fire safety information to social residents and how they recall and understand key messages.

**Approach:** Landlord and resident group members from CHP, SHG and YHN co-designed an infographic about fire safety together with their local Fire and Rescue Service. A sample of residents living in high rise blocks and sheltered accommodation were contacted by each landlord and surveyed about their knowledge of fire safety and what measures they took to reduce fire risk in their homes. They were also asked about their preferred method of communication.

Participating social residents were then provided with a fire safety infographic. SHG used the resident's preferred contact method, CHP used mainly paper based communication to suit the communities in its sheltered housing and Your Homes Newcastle divided its blocks into groups of three and used a different communication method with each.

A few weeks later, social residents' fire safety knowledge was surveyed again to identify whether seeing the infographic had helped them to identify and recall more fire safety measures.

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

# Fire safety in your home

Top tips for keeping you and your family safe

## Plugs



Turn off appliance plugs when not in use.

## Doors



Do not leave a fire door open and never disconnect an automatic closer.

## Appliances



Do not leave appliances running when no one is home.

## Smoking



Do not smoke in bed and always put out cigarettes fully.

## Smoke alarms



Test your smoke alarm weekly and do not cover or remove.

## BBQ



If you have a balcony, do not have a BBQ on it.

## Cooking



Do not leave cooking unattended.

## Belongings



A tidy home with fewer belongings can reduce the risk of a fire spreading.

## Candles



Do not leave candles unattended and always put out fully.

## Matches



Store matches and lighters in a safe place, away from children.

## Electrical



Do not overload electrical sockets and switch them off when not in use.

## Flammable



Do not store anything flammable such as petrol in your home.

CHP contacted 764 residents in sheltered accommodation, 66% responded to the first survey and 41% to the second survey. For tall buildings 176 residents were contacted, 52% responded to the first survey and 32% to the second survey.

SHG targeted 1,719 high rise homes across 22 blocks. 582 people (34%) of residents completed the first survey, 225 (13%) of these completed the second. SHG recorded demographic information which showed an even spread of responses from across age groups.

YHN focused 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 in the first survey, with representation from all 42 blocks and 276 completed the second survey.

### **Findings:**

- All three organisations found that personalised letters had the most impact on knowledge, understanding and recollection of fire safety measures in the home. Regardless of any stated preference of communication method by the resident CHP saw a 66% increase in awareness of fire safety measures, YHN saw a 26% increase and SHG saw a 27% increase.
- Social residents' knowledge and recollection of fire safety measures in the home improved across the three organisations following the infographic being provided to them. Over 33% of SHG residents, 62% of CHP residents and 89% of YHN recalled the infographic.
- The most trusted source of fire safety information was the Fire Service and landlord. Perceived confidence in the landlord increased following the infographic being provided by 25% for CHP's residents, by almost 17% at SHG, and 11% at YHN.
- Only 66% of CHP social 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.
- Testing recall over a few weeks is different to dealing with how much residents recall under the pressure of fire. These findings demonstrate the importance of repeating information to residents regularly to help with memory retention.

## **Theme 2: Landlord and Residents Responsibilities**

***Led by Clarion Housing Group (CHG), Phoenix Community Housing (PCH) and Pool Housing Partnership (PHP)***

**Aim:** To develop approaches for landlords that would support access to social residents' homes in a variety of situations when there is a fire risk, with a focus on vulnerable residents, in particular residents in social housing that hoard.

### **Approaches:**

#### ***i. Using 'nudge' theory to assist with behavioural change:***

Nudges are small changes to the way choices are presented that make it more likely people will choose the option that brings greater benefits to themselves or the

wider community<sup>2</sup>. CHG tested whether bespoke, targeted communication could help improve access to resident's homes to carry out fire safety work. 165 homes in North London were due to be fitted with fire detection systems. 82 of the residents were randomly allocated to a control group and 83 to an intervention group. Both groups received a sheet containing answers to frequently asked questions about the planned fire safety work. A photo of the residents' home was added to the top of the answer sheet sent to residents in the intervention group to assess the value of personalised communications.

## ii. Review of Hoarding and Complex Cases

PHP reviewed its approach to hoarding and compiled a set of guidelines, procedure plan and two case studies.

### iii. A 'Listening Workshop

CHG worked closely with West Kent Mind to design and organise one day workshop, to review how social residents and landlords can work together to make gaining access to homes easier. It was attended by 27 delegates and residents from 14 social housing providers and other stakeholders. Visual illustration was used to capture the outputs of complex and emotive detailed discussions.



### iv. Resident Engagement Sessions

CHG held five Resident Engagement Days across London. A resident led engagement approach took place throughout the summer of 2019 and captured the views of residents with regards to what they considered to be the most important factors to consider when seeking to access homes.

### v. Engagement with Partner Agencies

CHG identified and supported a small group of social residents who hoard through the New Beginnings programme<sup>3</sup>. The residents were interviewed by a Clarion staff member at the end of the programme to discuss their thoughts and experiences.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bi.team/press-releases/results-from-nudge-interventions-are-real-and-meaningful-finds-largest-ever-independent-analysis/>

<sup>3</sup> New Beginnings is a 12-week programme offered by West Kent Mind for people who have problems with hoarding and self-neglect. The project aims to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of people who hoard and help prevent the need for statutory intervention. <https://westkentmind.org.uk/what-we-offer/new-beginnings>



## Findings:

The sub-group found that there are six key principles that landlords should consider when looking to obtain access to social resident's homes:

- **Building trust with residents;**
  - Understand where residents are coming from.
  - Foster positive interaction from day one.
  - Be transparent and ensure that resident expectations are met.
  
- **Providing a clear explanation of why access is needed;**
  - Provide all information up front, including a timetable of works.
  - Use simple language and pictures where possible.
  - Explain the possible impacts of work (e.g. visible impact of the home, etc).
  
- **Using effective communication methods;**
  - Use a range of communication channels to reflect the needs and demographics of residents.
  - Identify the trusted voices within a community and harness their support.
  - Ensure regular communication and reinforce messages through a campaign.
  
- **Delivering the service well;**
  - Offer flexible service that work for residents (appointment times etc).
  - Have the correct monitoring in place to ensure the quality of work and deal effectively with any problems.
  - Delivery should be underpinned by strong resident engagement.
  
- **Understanding and mitigating any factors impacting on the resident; and**
  - Understand the impacts that a request for access will have on a resident (e.g. timings noise etc).
  - Put right any adverse effects (e.g. clean up any mess and redecorate).
  - Be clear with residents about possible impacts from the outset and ensure ongoing conversations.
  
- **Using a personalised approach based on the above.**
  - Listen and respond to resident concerns.
  - Target appropriate actions to the needs of different resident groups.
  - Think outside the box.

### **Theme 3: Action to Take in the Event of a Fire**

#### ***Led by Optivo and Sheffield City Council (SCC).***

**Aim:** To find out whether a written guide or a pair of videos has the greatest impact on residents' understanding, trust and recall of information about action to take if there is a fire in their building.

**Approach:** Optivo and SCC recruited 340 participants through face to face contacts, phone calls, mail-outs and emails. Residents were drawn from a cross-section of tenures comprising general needs, sheltered and student accommodation. A baseline survey was conducted at the point of recruitment gauging participants' confidence and knowledge about what to do in the event of a fire across four different scenarios.

The participants were then randomly assigned to one of three groups as part of a Randomised Controlled Trial using materials produced by the London Fire Brigade.

One group of residents received a new fire safety guide [https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/media/3000/hfsg-a5-leaflet-english\\_aw.pdf](https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/media/3000/hfsg-a5-leaflet-english_aw.pdf) explaining what to do in the event of a fire. A second group was given a hyperlink to a pair of animated videos <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/escape-plan/escape-plan-blocks-of-flats/> on the same topic. And a third – the 'control' group – received neither of the materials in an effort to track changes in hypothetical compliance in the absence of an intervention.

Follow-up surveys were completed with 187 participants roughly two weeks after they had received the materials under test.

#### **Findings:**

- Written advice and videos are equally effective in improving residents' understanding. Difference in learning styles and preferences mean some respond better to animated videos than written information and vice-versa.
- Up to 25% more residents report they would follow the fire brigade's advice, having had access to the material compared with residents in the control group.
- Around 40% report they would still be likely to evacuate if there was a fire elsewhere in their building and they were in their flat, despite having recently viewed the materials, contrary to the fire brigade's advice. This was in response to questioning and not a real-life situation.
- Further research is needed to determine how longer-term recall is influenced by the medium by which fire safety advice is conveyed. Recall of the action to take in the event of a fire might be different in a real-life situation.

## **What can be learnt from the work of the Group?**

Group members have shared the lessons that they have learnt over the last eighteen months. There is much potential to build on their positive work, and their insights can help other landlords and building safety managers when engaging with residents about fire safety work.

The members have told us that:

- Landlords should repeatedly remind residents of the recommended course of action in the event of a fire in order to familiarise them with the advice. It is not sufficient only to inform residents of fire safety policies at the point of sign-up.
- Approaches to convey fire safety messages and evacuation procedures need to take the diversity of resident's needs, learning styles and preferences into account. Lack of internet access and poor digital literacy are also barriers that need to be considered when assessing the likely impact of any video campaign.
- Engagement between residents and landlords that is open, honest and listens to the concerns of both sides is most likely to deliver successful (and cost efficient) outcomes, and it is for the landlord to facilitate that positive environment.
- A key factor to successful engagement is finding what also works for those that are difficult to reach and ensuring that approaches are flexible enough to facilitate different routes.
- Working with other key stakeholders and trusted voices within the community leads to successful resident engagement.

These lessons learnt support the Building Safety Bill requirement on the accountable person to ensure that residents automatically receive relevant building safety information; implement a resident engagement strategy which must be tailored to the needs of residents in their building; and set up a complaints system for residents.

## **What next for the Group?**

Group members have already begun to share the learning from the Group with other social housing providers and are reaching out to private housing providers.

The fire safety infographic with local fire service logo and the Access Principle Hexagon have already been shared with ARMA and these are now starting to be used in the private sector. Members have also presented on their work at several housing conferences, leading to these products being shared widely across the social sector.

The members have presented their findings to the Industry Safety Steering Group, which is chaired by Dame Judith Hackitt, and their work was extremely well received.

The members are continuing to promote and share their learning and findings of the Group as a whole.

Being part of the Group has led to landlord members increasing awareness of their evacuation policies with residents and using trusted voices more to communicate messages. It has also improved communication with residents and encouraged the resident members to become more involved with their organisations and reach out to other residents. The member organisations are also continuing to develop and build on their initiatives.

**Poole Housing Partnership** will continue to share the guidelines they have developed for gaining access to vulnerable resident's homes with other organisations. They will be bringing together best practice from participating organisations and sharing wider case studies, covering organisations that are more diverse than Poole Housing Partnership in terms of geography or housing type.

**Clarion Housing Group** intend to continue exploring the benefits of a personalised approach and to continue testing the nudge approach. Both organisations intend to continue to work with key stakeholders to produce a resident engagement pack with ideas and templates of best practice for social landlords to use when engaging with residents for fire safety works. The organisations will continue to grow partnerships between housing providers and mental health charities. Areas of shared interests could include co-creating training for staff members on how to identify and deal with cases where residents hoard.

**Phoenix Community Housing** are using a census of residents to gather more information on residents' ability to self-evacuate from their homes or blocks. Along with questions about household membership and contact details, residents are being asked a question on whether they would be able to make their own way out of the building in the event of a fire. For all residents who reply 'no', Phoenix will carry out further contact in order to review personal evacuation plans. All details will be captured on the housing association's CRM system and regularly reviewed.

**Stockport Homes** are working with social housing providers to establish a resident engagement fire safety group for housing providers throughout Greater Manchester to share best practice and navigate through the Building Safety Bill to ensure residents have the best opportunities to engage.

**Your Homes Newcastle** 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 Housing Partnership** has commenced a deep dive into all areas of fire safety.

**Optivo** and **Sheffield City Council** are working to produce bespoke fire and building safety advice, tailored to individual buildings. **Optivo** is at an advanced stage and hopes to integrate bespoke fire safety information into its lettings sign-up app by the end of the year

**Sheffield City Council** has committed to producing block-specific fire safety information with the input of its High-Rise Resident Group and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Some helpful feedback has been shared by the Group about how improvements could be made to any future Group of this nature. Setting more defined expectations would have been of benefit, although the exploratory nature of the Group was recognised. This is an important consideration when trying to strike the right balance between providing direction and ensuring the work of such a group is led by the organisation members rather than the MHCLG.

Finally, it's been encouraging to hear from the members about how their involvement with the Group has helped and influenced their response to the challenges posed by Covid-19 and how the members' involvement with the group has helped with their research, and how it broadened their connections across different sectors.

## **Annex A – Findings**

Information and Understanding combined report

Landlords and Residents Responsibilities combined report

Action to take in the Event of a Fire combined report

Optivo findings

Sheffield City Council findings



## Annex B – Terms of Reference

The Group will seek to identify the best ways for landlords and residents to work together in making and keeping buildings safe through effective communication and engagement.

### Aims

The Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group (“the Best Practice Group”) will test ways to engage effectively with residents in giving them a strong voice in an improved system of building safety. This will support the Government in taking forward the recommendations in Chapter 4 of Dame Judith Hackitt’s ‘Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety,’ and will deliver on the commitment in the Green Paper ‘A new deal for social housing’.

The principal aims of the Best Practice Group will be to:

- build on existing social sector expertise in working closely with residents;
- develop best practice in the fields of engagement and communication with residents;
- inform future policy development; and
- consider how approaches to resident engagement with regards to fire and building safety could be applied to other tenures.

The Best Practice Group will meet on a monthly basis for an initial period of six months. This arrangement will be reviewed and potentially lead to a further six-month commitment.

a) The Best Practice Group will undertake to:

- i. Design and deliver pilots, aiming to provide clear objectives, success measures and tangible outputs which can realistically be implemented over the course of 6 months. These pilots will provide a range of evidence of effective good practice in communicating with residents on fire safety;
- ii. Consider the most effective methods of sharing best practice and disseminating important messages on building safety to the wider sector in order to foster a culture of resident engagement across all tenures;
- iii. Contribute towards independent advice for Ministers that draws together the learning from robust evaluation of these pilots, maximising on the range of practices and experiences from the Group members.

b) In particular, the Best Practice Group will be responsible for advising on or developing best practice for the future in relation to:



- i. Communicating critical building safety information to residents to shape the development of guidance, taking account of diverse needs;
  - ii. Ensuring residents who wish to are able to access more detailed building safety information;
  - iii. Involving residents in decision-making and the development of resident engagement strategies;
  - iv. Ensuring concerns are listened to and that robust systems for responding to safety concerns are in place; and
  - v. Considering options for how residents will be made aware of their role in ensuring their own safety and that of their neighbours.
- c) Members of the Group will seek to ensure the best interests of residents remain central and that residents are thoroughly and genuinely represented in the working of the Group.
- d) The Best Practice Group will have due consideration to work being carried out in the wider Department, particularly aiming to achieve outcomes that help to deliver effectively on the “Building a Safer Future” Implementation Plan.
- e) The Group will take account of the work of other groups such as the Residents’ Reference Panel on Building Safety in High Rise Residential Buildings, commissioned by the Department to help inform Government decisions on building safety, and the Residents Organisations Reference Group which aims to ensure that key messages on building safety are widely communicated to resident membership bodies.
- f) The Best Practice Group will report its findings to Government once the initial six-month period has concluded.

### **Meetings and Governance**

- g) At the inaugural meeting, the Group will decide upon the time and location of the monthly meetings, and how best to incorporate flexible means of engagement.
- h) The Department will provide the secretariat and a Responsible Officer to enable the Group’s oversight of its aims and objectives.
- i) The functions of the Secretariat will be to:
- i. Arrange and communicate venues and meeting times;
  - ii. Consult with Group members, the Chair and across the Department in developing agendas;
  - iii. Issue meeting notes and monitor actions through to successful completion;

- iv. Commission papers for the next meeting, as required by the action log;
  - v. Liaise with action owners to ensure progress is being made;
  - vi. Issue papers to Group members a minimum of 48 hours before the meeting;
  - vii. Support the Group and Chair with preparing advice for Ministers.
- j) The functions of the Responsible Officer will be to support the work of this Group to ensure it adds value and maximises reach by ensuring an aligned approach with other groups and across the Department.
  - k) The aim will be that decisions are made by consensus and in agreement with the Chair. In the event of there being different views amongst the Group, the Chair will reflect these back to Ministers.
  - l) Members will be invited to the Group by the Minister of State for Housing. All members invited must declare at their first meeting any personal or family interests - financial or otherwise - that might reasonably be thought to have capacity to influence their participation in the Best Practice Group.
  - m) Members must be able to give the time and resource commitment to attend meetings of the Group and undertake pilots. Members must satisfy themselves they have adequate powers within their existing framework to deliver these pilots; membership of the Group will not displace these powers.
  - n) Should the Group wish to vary its terms of reference, it must request to do so by agreement with the Chair, in consultation with the Department.



## **Annex C - Membership**

An invitation to make Expressions of Interest was published on 26 October 2018 seeking applications for the Best Practice Group from social landlords. Applicants were asked to demonstrate innovation and successful performance in resident engagement, as well as evidence how they would support one of their residents to become a member of the Group.

There was a really strong field of applicants and it was encouraging to see so much commitment from landlords across the country to strengthening effective engagement with their residents. As well as considering applicants with the higher scores, the type of landlord, their geography and the volume and type of homes were considered, to ensure a balance as far as possible.

The members of the Group are landlord and resident representatives from:

- Chelmer Housing Partnership
- Clarion Housing Group
- Optivo
- Phoenix Community Housing
- Poole Housing Partnership
- Sheffield City Council
- Stockport Homes Group
- Your Homes Newcastle

Two fire and building safety experts were also invited to join the Group to provide technical advice and guidance to the members, where necessary. Paul Everall, the then Chief Executive of Local Authority Building Control and Tim Birchall, Fire Safety Technical Office Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, are carrying out these roles.