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FIRE SAFETY

STRATEGY

LS/OCTOBER.2017/S12



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Registration No. HCB 161 SC Registered: Financial Conduct Authority - 1818 R(S).
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Healthy Working Lives



CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction & Context	3
2. Action taken to date	4
3. Proposed Action Plan	6
6. Timetable of Action Points	9

Appendices

1. INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

a) BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the events in June this year at the Grenfell Tower in London, the issue of fire safety has been highlighted. Since the tragedy, MHA has received communication from the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, the Housing Regulator and various media outlets concerning fire safety. Although the emphasis from the statutory agencies has concentrated on buildings classed as high rise housing, MHA has sought to enter into discussions with local residents in relation to our tenements and the need to keep common areas and stairwells free from obstructions. As this is an ongoing issue, the Association will continue to work closely with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

b) MHA TENANCY AGREEMENT

The main problem that the Association has in terms of fire safety relates to residents blocking common access areas and stairwells with items like prams, bikes, toys and bags of rubbish or other debris. In terms of MHA Tenancy Agreement the following is stated:

2. USE OF THE PROPERTY AND THE COMMON PARTS

No property belonging to you or anyone residing with you or anyone visiting you, including bicycles, motorcycles or prams, should be stored in any of the common parts except in areas set aside for storage. You must not do anything which causes inconvenience or danger to anyone using the common parts.

3. RESPECT FOR OTHERS In particular, you, those living with you, and your visitors must not: (this list is simply containing examples and is not exhaustive)

- leave rubbish in unauthorised places;

It is important to note that, although the above clause in the Tenancy Agreement is clear, the advice from TC Young Solicitors suggests that it would be difficult for MHA to take legal action against a tenant leaving items in the common close as, although this action is a technical breach of the tenancy agreement, MHA would need to prove that it was a significant inconvenience or danger.

It should also be noted that, as far as we are aware from speaking to others, no housing association has physically removed any prams, bikes etc from common areas. From the housing associations that staff spoke to, the only action that they have taken to date is to raise awareness of the potential consequences via newsletters.

2. ACTION TO DATE

a) EXPERT ADVICE

Upon hearing of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Director immediately sought advice from MHA's architect in terms of any action that may be required for the Association stock. The Architect subsequently confirmed that non combustible materials are used in MHA properties and also the Building Regulations and control systems in Scotland are more robust than those used in England. (Appendix A)

Members are asked to note that all fire equipment and systems in MHA offices and relevant properties like the Great Eastern Development have been checked and are fully operational.

b) REPORTING TO THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

A discussion took place at the Services Committee Meeting held on 27 June 2017 (Appendix B). At this meeting, the Director advised members of the action that has been taken to date and of the further plans to continue to address the issue of fire safety with a focus on highlighting the fire risks associated with blocking stairwells. A further update on fire prevention was discussed at the August Services Committee Meeting (Appendix C).

c) ADVOIDING FIRES IN YOUR CLOSE LEAFLET

Following a meeting with the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, a leaflet entitled 'Avoiding Fires in your Close' was distributed to all MHA residents with the Summer Edition of the Milnbank Messenger. The leaflet highlighted the importance of keeping common closes free from obstruction and provides an Action Plan that should be followed in the event of a fire (Appendix D). A supply of this leaflet is also displayed in the office reception area.

d) HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKS

The above leaflet also advises that the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service offer a free home fire safety visit. MHA promoted this service at the recent series of Community Services Meetings and at the AGM.

e) AGM

As agreed by the Management Committee, a representative of the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service was invited to provide a talk at the AGM held at the end of September. The feedback from this confirms that the members who attended found the talk to be very interesting and informative.

f) MENTOR HEALTH & SAFETY

As part of our membership subscription, the issue of fire safety was discussed with MHA's dedicated Health & Safety Officer. The advice from Mentor, which was the same as the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, is that common stairwells and closes should remain 'sanitised' i.e. free from obstacles at all times. They also advised that a Fire Action Notice should be displayed in all closes.

g) FIRE SAFETY, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

In September 2017, the Scottish Governments Ministerial Working Group issued a consultation paper in order to seek views on fire and smoke alarms. MHA's response is attached to the report. (Appendix E)

h) REGISTER OF PROPERTIES

Immediately following the Grenfell fire, the Housing Service Officers began a series of close inspections. The aim of the inspections was to ascertain the addresses of properties where items like bikes; prams etc were evident in common closes and landings. A pro-forma (Appendix F) was used to collate this information. The visits also involved a door chapping exercise whereby residents were asked to remove items. Fortunately, the majority of the residents understood the potential dangers and removed the items.

A total of 2,165 close and landing inspections are required. To date, 1,788 have been carried out which leaves 377 outstanding. So far, 206 items have been identified, most of which are of a very minor nature, including shoes, boots, plant pots. Larger items include: prams, barbecues and bikes chained to stairs.

3. PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

a) REGISTER OF PROPERTIES

As highlighted above, staff have been engaging and having on-going dialogues with residents to ensure that obstructions are removed, this work will continue. The nature of the discussions will depend upon the level of the obstruction caused e.g. if the item is flammable, or causes a serious blockage, or is a danger, staff will implement all 5 steps of the Stair Aware procedure below. There may also be occasions where the police are called if it is deemed to be of a very serious nature. On the other hand, and in the majority of cases, where there are items like net curtains or door mats, residents will be advised, in writing, that this is a potential danger but MHA would not take any action other than record this in the residents file.

Part of the discussions will include talking to residents about alternative storage, examples of which may include: MHA purchasing a garden shed to house in back gardens which residents can use to store items, MHA supplying a cycle storage rack, look at the use of cellars in close, clearing and redefining bin stores. All dialogue of this nature will be recorded in resident's files.

b) SANCTIONS IMPLEMENTED BY MHA

- 1) Stair Aware Campaign - In conjunction with the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, a Stair Aware Campaign has been devised. This involves a series of letters which are issued to those residents who, despite MHA best efforts, continue to store items on landings. The series of letters are attached (Appendix G) and are based on 5 steps: ***STAFF ARE ENCOURAGED TO LOOK AT EVERY CASE ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS RATHER THAN USE A RIGID APPROACH.***

ALL DIALOGUE WITH EVERY RESIDENT MUST BE RECORDED

STEP 1 – A member of staff will talk to the resident regarding the obstruction with the aim being to either remove the item or alternative storage arrangements being agreed.

STEP 2 - Stair Aware poster placed on items.

STEP 3 - Letter issued giving resident 7 days to remove items.

STEP 4 - Letter issued advising a referral has been made to Scottish Fire and Rescue to carry out a formal Fire Assessment of the building and a further 7 days is given to remove the items.

STEP 5 - Final letter issued advising resident that the Estates Team have been instructed to remove the items immediately and these will be stored safely by MHA at Port Dundas. **BEFORE THIS STEP IS IMPLEMENTED PRIOR APPROVAL MUST BE RECEIVED FROM THE MANAGEMENT TEAM.**

- 2) Transfers – The Allocations Policy could be altered to include that a transfer request will not be considered in the cases of tenants who refuse to remove obstacles from common landing and closes.
- 3) Owner Occupiers – In closes where MHA does not have any tenants (Fixed Factoring Properties), the decision can be taken that MPS will end the factoring service unless items are removed. (It should be noted that the above clause has been added to the factoring agreement for all new closes wishing to be factored by MPS).

Inspections have highlighted that there are a few closes of mixed tenure whereby the design means that owners have an additional locked entrance from the common stairwell to their front doors. In these circumstances, MHA staff have spoken to the owners, pointing out the potential dangers in the event of a fire route escape. However, the owners, while acknowledging this are adamant that they will keep the entrances locked for security reasons. It is recommended that in examples of this practice, MHA requests a Fire Officer to inspect and provide advice. MHA confirms the discussion in writing to the owner and retains on file in order to demonstrate that advice has been provided.

c) FIRE ACTION NOTICE IN COMMON CLOSES

Following Mentor's advice, it is proposed that a Fire Action Notice, advising what to do in the event of fire & what to do if you discover a fire, is displayed in all MHA closes.

d) HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKS

Home fire safety checks will continue to be encouraged and MHA will use every opportunity to promote this free service.

e) MESSENGER ARTICLE

Articles highlighting awareness of fire safety and the need to clear common stairwells and closes free of obstacles will continue to be featured in future Milnbank Messengers.

f) SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

The closing date for submissions for the above is the beginning of December 2017. The Management Committee will be kept advised of the feedback when it is received.

g) GENERAL ITEMS

- 1) It has been confirmed that the lift at the Great Eastern Development automatically switches off if the fire alarm goes. Mentor has advised that a sign to advise of this should be put in all lifts.
- 2) A house visit to undertake a risk assessment will be carried out to all residents who currently keep a mobility scooter in the common close area.
- 3) Consideration will also be given to replacing the current close notice boards with fire resistant ones on a phased basis as part of the future close painting programme.

4. **TIMETABLE OF ACTION POINTS**

In order to action the various points raised in the report, the undernoted Action Points have been collated.

ACTION POINT	LEAD OFFICER	DATE TO BE COMPLETED
Co-ordinate the completion of the remaining outstanding close inspections.	Depute HS Manager	End Oct, 2017
Upon completion of the close inspections, compile a report for the Services Committee to include: the inspection findings, alternative storage discussed with residents & an update on the Stair Aware Campaign.	Depute HS Manager	Services Cttm Meeting on 28 Nov. 2017
A written procedure on removing obstacles for storage at Port Dundas to be compiled, and implemented, by the Housing Services Officers.	Depute HS Manager	End Oct, 2017
Incorporate suspending transfer applicants who refuse to remove obstacles from their landing into the Allocations Policy review.	Housing Services Manager	Services Cttm Meeting on 28 Nov. 2017
Agree the proposal to cease factoring closes whereby the owners refuse to remove obstacles from their landing.	Property Manager	MPS Board Meeting on 27 Nov. 2017
Agree to the staff proposal of not enforcing additional entries to remain unlocked.	Housing Services Manager	MT Meeting on 17 Oct. 2017
Arrange for a Fire Action Notice to be produced in accordance with Mentor advice.	Compliance Co-ordinator	By end of Oct. 2017

Ensure the Fire Action Notice is displayed in all MHA common closes.	Depute HS Manager	By end of Nov. 2017
Continue to highlight fire safety in MHA publicity materials like the Messenger etc	Depute Director	On-going
Advise the Management Committee of the feedback from the Scottish Governments consultation when available.	Director	TBC
Arrange for a Fire Notice sign to be produced and displayed in the lifts at the GE Development in accordance with Mentor advice.	Compliance Co-ordinator	By end of Oct. 2017
Conduct a risk assessment to all residents with mobility scooters.	Maintenance Officer	By end of Dec. 2017
Source fire resistant notice boards for closes.	Compliance Co-ordinator	By end of Nov. 2017