



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

FIRE SAFETY IN IRELAND

REPORT OF THE FIRE SAFETY TASK FORCE

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

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FIRE SAFETY IN IRELAND

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Background

In the early hours of the 14 June 2017, a fire broke out in a flat in Grenfell Tower, North Kensington, London. The fire developed rapidly, spreading upwards and sideways along the exterior of the building and engulfing the floors above the fire, and tragically claimed 72 lives.

In the immediate aftermath of this event, Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy, T.D. directed the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in his Department to convene a national Fire Safety Task Force to consider the potential for a similar tragedy in this country and to review and make recommendations on fire safety in Ireland.

The Fire Safety Task Force

The Task Force's membership was drawn from a cross-section of specialist expertise. In addition to planners, regulators, architects and social housing experts, there were also representatives from private sector consultancies, chief fire officers, a staff association and both local and national government. The Task Force met on 12 occasions between July 2017 and April 2018.

The Task Force's Initial Actions

Minister Eoghan Murphy directed that initial attention focus on two areas which appeared connected with Grenfell Tower – high-rise buildings and multi-storey, multi-unit social housing – and asked the Task Force to oversee work on both. Initially, work focussed on the factors seen as likely to have contributed to the tragedy and a survey was undertaken across the country to establish if the circumstances which led to the disastrous event in London were present in Ireland.

Local authorities were requested to carry out a preliminary survey to identify all buildings of more than six storeys, or 18m in height. Specifically, they were asked to identify those buildings which had external cladding which might be cause for concern. The nationwide survey identified that there were some 842 medium to high rise buildings. 291 of these had external cladding systems of interest. The owners were required under the powers of the Fire Services Acts to undertake detailed fire safety assessments in 226 buildings.

Fire Safety in Multi-Storey, Multi-Unit Social Housing

The Task Force also oversaw the response to Minister Murphy's request to local authorities to assess fire safety measures in their existing multi-storey, multi-unit social housing. Specifically, local authorities were requested to examine fire detection and alarm systems, emergency lighting systems, common escape routes, including corridors, stairways and emergency exits, and to ensure that such systems were both in place and fully functional.

This local authority survey examined fire safety arrangements in 1,227 buildings with more than 16,000 residential units. The survey revealed that communal fire detection and alarm systems were confirmed in 94% of buildings and emergency lighting systems were confirmed in 93% of buildings. It further confirmed that proper escape routes were available in those buildings. Where deficiencies were encountered work was initiated to remedy the situation. This survey provides considerable reassurance of the standard of fire safety within this profile of social housing building stock

Outcome of this Initial Work

Typically, disasters result from a progression of failures rather than one single issue and the national surveys have provided re-assurance that the combination of contributory factors in London do not appear to be present in buildings in Ireland. This does not infer that we should be complacent about the standard of fire safety in the existing medium to high-rise stock. Action to remediate or improve fire safety features was deemed necessary in a number of buildings as a result of the fire safety assessments. While improvement works are underway currently in a small number of buildings (approximately 10% of those where assessments were required) full fire safety assessments and improvement works remain to be completed in some of the identified buildings. The Task Force recommends that national oversight is maintained of this assessment process in the months ahead and that any emergent issues are dealt with and an oversight report is provided to the Minister at the end of the process. However, the survey and follow-up actions are seen to have reduced the probability of a disastrous fire by identifying and dealing with potential contributory issues.

Fire Safety in Multi-storey Residential Buildings

The key to life safety in all multi-storey, multi-unit residential buildings is a proper two-stage fire detection and alarm system, together with an evacuation strategy so residents know how to react in the event of fire alarms being activated.

The Task Force recommends that building management companies and/or other "persons having control" of such buildings review their fire safety arrangements and ensure that appropriate fire protection facilities are present within all multi-storey, multi-unit buildings and that these are checked and maintained routinely and

recommends also that fire services offer training to Directors of Apartment Management Companies on key life safety issues.

The experience of actual fires gives confidence that the current fire safety strategy is appropriate and effective in protecting persons living in medium to high-rise buildings. The activation of fire detection and alarm systems, the effective evacuation of the premises, the success of compartmentation/ construction in containing the fire and the efficacy of fire service response are all part of the recommended approach to protecting life safety in all multi-storey residential buildings. The challenge is to ensure that these elements, which contribute to the overall outcome of fire safety, are in place and available in all buildings.

Broader Perspective on Fire Safety in Ireland

As well as overseeing the specific tasks in relation to medium to high rise buildings and social housing, the Task Force also undertook a broader review of existing fire safety arrangements in Ireland. This wide-ranging perspective includes legislation, policy and approach to achieving the societal objective of fire safety in Ireland.

The Task Force Report makes a number of recommendations for enhancing the current fire safety system. The statutory responsibilities of the “person having control” of premises, as set out in section 18 of the Fire Services Acts, emerged as a key area of focus for the Task Force and a number of amendments are proposed to the current regulatory system in order to enhance and ensure fire safety in certain categories of buildings, in particular in certain forms of residential/ sleeping accommodation identified as a priority area for fire safety efforts. The legislative amendments proposed by the Task Force seek to clarify and make explicit the statutory obligations imposed on the ‘person having control’ as well as introducing a new mechanism through which the fire safety arrangements in place in premises and sleeping accommodation are brought to the attention of the public. To ensure that “persons having control” of premises take action to fulfil their statutory obligations, a revised focus on enforcement is recommended in parallel to deal with any disregard for fire safety considerations.

In the following sections, the overview/ conclusions and recommendations of the Task Force are set out in relation to each of the Chapters of the Report, and are given as a summary output.

CHAPTER 3 FIRE FATALITIES IN IRELAND

Overview/ Conclusions

The overall trend in terms of fire deaths per million of population in Ireland has had a welcome downward trajectory. At 6.9 deaths/ per million of population the fire death rate now is almost half what it was fifteen years ago.

There can be significant fluctuations in the numbers of fire deaths recorded from year to year. This is exemplified in 2016 and 2017, where 2016 recorded a forty year low of 20 fire fatalities, only to be doubled to 41 fatalities in 2017.

Although it is difficult to compare trends in international statistics, the current rate of fire fatalities/ per million of population positions Ireland at a level where it is in the league of countries which are seen to have minimised deaths from fire.

The re-alignment of fire service work towards Community Fire Safety that began with the Farrell Grant Sparks Review Report of 2002 is seen to be a major contributor to the overall downward trend in fatalities in Ireland.

Research indicates that there is a very significant uptake (approaching 95%) of domestic smoke alarms in Irish households. However, it is not as clear that all are tested and are functioning at this high percentage.

Preliminary results of an investigation commissioned from the Health Research Board of coroners' reports of fire fatalities indicates that alcohol and/ or drugs are present in the blood stream of a significant portion (28%) of fire fatality cases. While this work remains to be concluded, it may indicate a need to re-focus safety messaging on personal behaviour and to identify vulnerable groups in society.

Recommendations

The efforts that have gone into Community Fire Safety programmes need to be maintained and focussed on those who are perceived as particularly vulnerable to fire risk.

Further research needs to be commissioned (e.g. via the CSO's household survey) to confirm the extent to which fire safety measures are in place in peoples' homes and the public's understanding of risk in the domestic setting with a view to informing further fire safety campaigns.

CHAPTER 4 THE SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO FIRE SAFETY

Overview/ Conclusions

Ireland's approach to fire safety is set out in the 2013 national policy document "Keeping Communities Safe". Policy is based on the internationally recognised systemic approach to risk management which is an internationally recognised safety paradigm. The systems approach underpins the activities of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and was used in the development and roll-out of Major Emergency Management arrangements in Ireland from 2006 onwards.

Local authority fire services work to prevent fires and other emergencies happening in the first instance. They also strive to ensure that there are appropriate in-built safety features in buildings to protect occupants from fires. And when fires do occur, they respond to assist the public with a view to protecting lives, infrastructure and property.

Fire services are provided by some 3,400 local authority staff, operating from a well-distributed infrastructure of 218 fire stations. Local authorities allocate some €275m of revenue expenditure per annum to deliver their fire services.

Most local authority fire services personnel are engaged in operational response activities. However, the shift towards deploying staff and resources for work associated with fire prevention and protection activity began with the Farrell Grant Sparks report (2002) which set the basis for community fire safety work, among other safety initiatives.

Challenges remain around enabling fire services personnel to use a bigger proportion of their time for appropriate fire safety activities, such as pre-incident familiarisation and home fire safety checks as well as enhancing structured integration of fire safety and operations activity and joining fire safety with other building planning and control systems to ensure "operational intelligence" is supporting effective fire service operations.

Eight years on from its inception to address national leadership issues in fire services in Ireland, the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management is perceived to have been particularly effective in aligning national and local efforts around common public safety objectives. The National Directorate's success in overseeing the building of an effective and integrated emergency management system has been demonstrated during severe

weather events in recent years. The development for the first time of national standards for local authority fire services and the subsequent benchmarking and validations process overseen by the Management Board is seen as equally significant in terms of a contribution to public safety. The National Directorate's role in steering and reporting the first national fire safety campaign in local authority provided Traveller accommodation was also a significant achievement.

Fire services prioritise the safety of their own staff and use a range of risk management techniques to identify and control the hazards faced by staff in providing their fire services. Managing safety is integrated into activity of all kinds in fire services, from the standards and processes used in recruitment, initial training, the kind of special appliances and equipment used, the personal protective equipment, the on-going training, instructions, supervision, as well as reviewing and learning from activities. Maintenance (and recording) as well as auditing and inspection of activity (to international standards) are also key factors in ensuring that fire services comply consistently with statutory duties on the safety of staff.

As required by section 20 of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005 all fire services in Ireland have a current Ancillary Safety Statement setting out their policies and approach to managing safety in the workplace.

As well as the overall approach described in their statutory Safety Statements, all fire services use the following measures to ensure that they are complying with their statutory safety, health and welfare duties:

- The National Incident Command System (NICS);
- Standard Operational Guidelines (SOGs);
- Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs);
- Brigade Instructions;
- Safety Auditing Systems including (OHSAS 18001: 2007/ ISO 45001: 2018);
- Occupational Health Systems (OHS);
- Critical Incident Stress Management Systems (CISM).

The Ancillary Safety Statements include risk assessments and safe working practices and procedures. Fire Services undertake different forms of risk assessment as employers to discharge the specific duty under section 19 of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act.

- Normal **Workplace risk assessments** are set out in Fire Service Ancillary Safety Statements (more than 50% of staff accidents/ incidents typically occur on the fire station);
- **Dynamic Risk Assessment** is undertaken by the Incident Commander at

the scene of emergency incidents as part of the Incident Command system;
and

- **Generic or Situational Risk Assessments** are undertaken for the various categories of incidents, derived from a national programme of Standard Operational Guidance.

These risk assessments are complementary with the initial Area Risk Categorisation processes described in Chapter 5. It is proposed in Chapter 9.5.4 to initiate an additional process of fire risk assessment of significant premises and buildings and other fire hazards in fire station areas.

Recommendations

Fire Services in Ireland should continue to use the systemic risk management paradigm to underpin their approach to managing fire risk.

Fire Services in Ireland should undertake the fire risk assessment process of significant premises and buildings and other fire hazards described in Chapter 9.5.4 as an approach to complement current Area Risk Categorisation and other risk assessment processes.

The current collaborative arrangements between central and local government in relation to development and implementation of fire safety policy should be continued and strengthened where possible.

Fire services should continue to accord high priority to ensuring staff safety in accordance with the requirements of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation.

Fire Services should ensure that Incident Command training and fire-fighting training is related to the priority fire risks premises and buildings in a fire station area, including for fighting fires in medium to high rise buildings

CHAPTER 5 LOCAL AUTHORITY FIRE SERVICES

Overview/ Conclusions

Over the course of 2014/2015, an External Validation Group (EVG) was commissioned by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to visit every fire service in the country as part of a review of an initial Area Risk Categorisation process in Ireland. In April 2016, the first EVG Report titled “***Local Delivery - National Consistency - Fire Services in Ireland***” was published. The report concluded, inter alia, that:

- Local authority fire services are applying and refining internationally-recognised risk management approaches to reduce the fire risk and the annual toll of life and property loss caused by fire.
- Local authority fire services are matching the assessed fire risk in their individual fire station areas with services based on both full-time and retained fire service models, with a comprehensive support infrastructure, and applying a range of appropriate fire prevention and fire protection approaches.
- Local authorities have prioritised and maintained the financial and personnel resources in their fire services at a time when they implemented significant reductions in all other areas.
- Local authorities have benchmarked their fire services against national standards and national norms, and a strong degree of national consistency, linked to fire station area risk categorisation, now exists in fire service provision; all local authorities are using new national norms introduced in 2013 through the Keeping Communities Safe Policy Document as minimum standards.

The EVG Report (2016) concluded also that the available evidence provides confidence regarding the match of fire service capability with assessed fire risk in accordance with the national standards published in the national policy document “Keeping Communities Safe”.

For the first time in the history of Irish fire services, the information available and the methodology in Keeping Communities Safe has enabled local authorities to benchmark their fire services against national standards and to report on the response standards being achieved. The first fire service appliance arrives in under 10 minutes at 38.6% of incidents; 66.2% in under 15 minutes, 83.5% in under 20 minutes and 95.7% in under 30 minutes.

The capacity of fire services in Ireland to respond to large scale incidents was reviewed by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. This review

concluded, as reported in their External Validation Group Report (April 2016), that local authorities have benchmarked their fire services against national standards and national norms, and that appropriate capacity in terms of fire appliances and fire-fighters, linked to area risk categorisation, now exists in fire service provision. More importantly, experience with recent fire incidents demonstrate that fire services have the capacity to mobilise and manage resources for large-scale incidents in accordance with national standards.

The policy decision made, as part of the Keeping Communities Safe Review process, to maintain the fire service as a local authority service has proven to be correct. Local authorities have:

- prioritised the resourcing of their fire services through a time of retrenchment;
- prioritised health and safety of staff, up to and including international standard accreditation (OHSAS 18001: 2007/ ISO 45001: 2018);
- mandated their fire services to lead development of emergency management and position local authorities as central within inter-agency emergency management;
- aligned their fire services with other local authority functions including building control, planning and social housing;
- accounted to local councils of elected members in the first instance;
- collaborated successfully with National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to develop, implement and report on fire safety priorities.

The provision of local authority fire service infrastructure (fire stations, fire appliances and specialist equipment and mobilisation and communications facilities) is supported by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management's Capital Grants Scheme.

The locations of the 217 fire stations provides a good, well-dispersed infrastructure for fire service operations. While the majority of fire stations have been constructed in the past 30 years and have full facilities, a five year (2016 – 2020) fire station construction/refurbishment programme is underway for the remaining prioritised projects. An additional fire station was opened in South Connemara in 2017.

A further fire appliance procurement programme (23 vehicles) is being undertaken in 2018 under the aegis the Office of Government Procurement. Fire Services management are working to consolidate and move from a single fire authority perspective on specialist appliances to shared provision of such resources.

Recommendations

The initial Area Risk Categorisation (ARC) exercise was undertaken in 2013/14 and validated in 2014/15 and reported in 2016. The second round of ARC should commence again in 2018 and should take account of the fire risk assessment of significant individual premises and buildings and other fire hazards described in Section 9.5.4.

The nationally recommended list of initial Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) in Appendix A of Keeping Community Safe should be reviewed by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to ensure that it remains appropriate and up-to-date.

Each Fire Service should review its response PDAs in light of Appendix A of Keeping Communities Safe and also taking account of the likely need for specific PDAs for buildings which are within the ambit of the fire risk assessments referred in Chapter 9.5.4. If there is a need for variations, fire services should adjust their responses before end 2018 to align with the minimum standards set as national policy and also to take account of the outcome of the fire risk assessments of individual buildings as described in section 9.5.4. Additional resources in support of the PDAs may be ordered by the Incident Commander at any stage. (See also recommendation in Chapter 8 in relation to review of PDAs in medium to high rise buildings).

Fire station area boundaries and PDAs should be adjusted in 2018 to reflect nearest available response, where this is not already the case, on the basis of the data/ evidence available which indicates that up to 5% of the population could benefit from faster first response times.

A new round of External Validation should be commenced in 2018 and in this, each fire service should confirm that it is using the national standard PDAs as a minimum basis for its initial fire service response, that it has set premises specific PDAs where appropriate for premises and buildings within the scope of the fire risk assessment process described in Section 9.5.4 of this Report and that the principle of mobilising the nearest available resource is being applied.

The national guidelines for specialist equipment maintenance, testing and recording should be implemented by all fire services in 2018.

CHAPTER 6 LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRE SAFETY

Overview/ Conclusions

On-going responsibility for fire safety in any premises (other than dwellings occupied as a single dwelling) rests with the “person having control” of that premises.

The general legal format of fire regulation in Ireland is functional (i.e. non-prescriptive) in nature, with a similar approach in building regulations. This means that legal requirements are set out in broad performance terms in legislation. Advice on compliance with statutory requirements is provided for designers and persons having fire safety responsibility in Guidance Documents and Codes of Practice. Part of the benefit of this approach is that it facilitates development and innovative design, as well as the use of existing buildings which prescriptive regulations could hinder.

Fire engineering approaches to building safety may also provide for trade-offs in fire safety features in buildings, although there may be reluctance on the part of those checking compliance to place over-reliance on ‘active’ fire safety features, as these need to be properly maintained over the life-time of a building.

The *Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014* (S.I. No. 9 of 2014) addressed perceived deficits in the Building Control regime by empowering competence and professionalism in construction projects and establishing a chain of responsibility that begins with the owner. The owner is required to assign competent persons to design, build, inspect and certify the building works. The competent persons, in turn, account for their contribution through the lodgement of compliance documentation, inspection plans and statutory certificates with the relevant building control authority.

The local authorities have statutory enabling powers in their role as building control and fire safety regulators and, if necessary, as enforcers of fire safety standards in accordance with building control legislation and fire services legislation.

Local authorities have a range of powers available ranging from giving **Advice**, or requesting the person in control to prepare a **Fire Safety Assessment** and furnish it to them, or serving a **Fire Safety Notice** requiring certain actions to be taken within a defined time-frame, or serving a **Closure Notice**, or seeking a **High Court order**, any of which they can use in an enforcement role if they are not satisfied about fire safety in a particular building. Local authorities are also notice

parties for licencing of the category of premises referred to as 'Places of Public Assembly' and may attend and give evidence at annual licencing courts.

Local authorities generally operate a system of prioritised auditing of premises, based on a risk grading approach. A number of projects are underway to assist local authorities in undertaking this individual building risk assessment process in a systematic way.

Overall, the scheme of legislative responsibility for fire safety in Ireland across the design, construction and operation of buildings is well established. It has been adjusted to address perceived weaknesses through revisions of the Fire Services Act in 2003 and the Building Control Amendment Regulations in 2014. However, later sections of this report address further questions raised and make recommendations which are intended to address issues discussed and which would strengthen the overall system and making it more visibly fit for purpose.

Recommendations

Specific fire safety inspections of new building works to check compliance with the Fire Safety Certificate and Part B of the Building Regulations, carried out by competent personnel, should be an additional measure of building control inspection policy.

Each fire service should prepare and publish a fire safety plan setting out its priorities and targets and matching its risk management activities to its life safety priorities. This is discussed further in Chapter 11.

All Government Departments and Public Service Organisations/ Agencies should review fire safety arrangements in the buildings they occupy in terms of potential for life loss, loss of critical national infrastructure and business continuity or potential economic impact.

Government Departments and Agencies should ensure that there is a "person having control" (per section 18(2) of the Fire Services Acts) designated in respect of each building and that they are briefed and trained on fire safety responsibilities. The allocation of section 18(2) responsibilities between relevant building occupiers and owners/ landlords should receive particular emphasis in this review and be clarified. Arrangements for maintenance of active fire safety systems such as fire detection and alarm systems and fire safety management including evacuation procedures should be clear.

Where deficiencies are identified in relation to threats to life safety, programmes to bring public buildings to relevant fire safety standards should be implemented over an appropriate period. In the event that deficiencies are identified by Government Departments/ Agencies (who do not hold title in property assets) that relate to the

building layout or construction/ fabric, these deficiencies should be notified to the OPW or to the relevant building title holder as appropriate.

There may be cost/ budgetary implications arising for Government Departments, Agencies and/or the OPW from this fire safety review exercise as remedial fire safety measures may be identified that need to be funded. However, steps to enhance fire safety management in buildings do not generally incur significant financial cost.

It is also recommended that public service bodies with extensive property portfolios should have access to their own fire safety expertise.

Each Government Department should prepare and publish a summary report on the outcome of the fire safety review of the properties they occupy and other public service organisations should do likewise.

CHAPTER 7 FIRE SAFETY IN DWELLINGS

Overview/ Conclusions

Practically all fire fatalities in Ireland occur in domestic settings. Studies indicate however that the vast majority (more than 90%) of Irish people have absorbed messages about protecting themselves and their families from fire and live in properties where the primary fire safety precaution – the smoke alarm – is present. It is less certain, however, that households routinely check their smoke alarms to ensure they are working properly.

Local authorities have responded fully to the Minister's request to review fire safety measures in their multi-storey, multi-unit social housing and have carried out inspections and necessary works arising within the requested timeframes. Overall, the review of fire safety in multi-story, multi-unit social housing is considered to be a comprehensive exercise, highlighting that local authorities are engaged fully on their fire safety responsibilities towards those who rely on social housing.

By identifying a small number of buildings where upgrade works were required to early warning systems and through engaging with Approved Housing Body and owners of private buildings leased in full by the local authority, the review process undertaken is seen to have had a positive effect and to have made contributions to both enhancing fire safety in multi-storey, multi-unit social housing and also raising fire safety awareness among owners/ landlords with statutory fire safety responsibilities.

In the aftermath of the Carrickmines fire tragedy in October 2015, local authorities undertook a similar national review of fire safety in local authority provided traveller accommodation together with improvement works. This work was reported in a 2016 Review.

Recommendations

Fire services should continue Community Fire Safety programmes and activities which have been developed over the past decade. Also, in the aftermath of responding to fire incidents, it is recommended that fire services personnel should call to neighbouring properties to check the presence of fire alarms and to ascertain/ advise re regular testing. In houses where smoke alarms are not present, they should offer to fit self-contained smoke alarms with 10 year batteries and advise occupants on fire safety issues, at the invitation of the householder. In this way, fire safety messaging (and action) can be brought to those most at risk at

a time when people are most receptive to this messaging.

Where local authorities provide housing directly, they should continue to ensure that appropriate fire precautions are inbuilt in their properties and that responsibility for fire safety is clearly outlined in their tenancy agreements. The current forms of contract between local authorities and landlords should be reviewed to ensure that fire safety is included appropriately.

Joint training and collaborative working should be developed between housing standards inspectors and relevant fire services personnel. All local authority staff training should take place under the auspices of Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG) and be QQI quality assured.

The Task Force is of the view that installation of fire detection and alarm systems and emergency lighting in multi-storey buildings with external balconies/access and egress via shared open balconies would not be merited, in general. However, the fire safety provisions in the external areas should be reviewed by housing authorities.

Periodic reviews/ overview reports of fire safety in local authority provided social housing is seen as beneficial and it is recommended that a review exercise of the type undertaken in 2017 should be undertaken and reported every five years.

Local authorities should ensure that they receive information in relation to the testing of fire detection and early warning systems in multi-storey social housing buildings under the control of Approved Housing Bodies/ private owners on a regular basis.

The removal/ disabling/ failure to maintain smoke alarms (or other actions or behaviours which endanger fire safety) in contravention of tenancy agreements should be a grounds for serious sanction, possible up to loss of the tenancy. In the case of social housing the local authority, being the housing authority, needs to consider how to react in such circumstances.

Guidance which codifies existing good practice on systems for the on-going, routine and planned testing and servicing of fire safety measures, including early warning systems and means of escape, in multi-storey, multi-unit social housing buildings should be developed and promulgated.

The provision of additional fire safety awareness raising activities should be considered and planned/ carried out by fire authorities, following the development of a number of best practice examples for local authorities in the guidance document referred to above.

Further consideration is needed on the overall approach to fire safety awareness, including the possible development of a fresh fire safety messaging campaigns, emphasising the importance of smoke alarms and the need for routine testing, for

distribution to all households in the country. The importance of social media, as well as more traditional leaflet type approaches, in communicating safety messages needs to be considered.

CHAPTER 8 FIRE SAFETY IN MEDIUM AND HIGH RISE BUILDINGS

Overview/ Conclusions

People have lived, worked and socialised safely in high-rise buildings for many decades. Fire safety strategies and associated construction standards for high rise buildings have been defined and applied over the years. Fires happen in high rise buildings, but the standard approaches to fire safety of compartmentation, protection of escape routes and early detection and alarm, allied with fire service intervention, have succeeded generally in keeping people safe. However, the images from Grenfell Tower showed how the normal fire precautions were negated by the intense fire spreading on the outer face of the building.

Part B – Fire Safety – of the Building Regulations 1997 – 2017 (as amended) sets out the legal requirements in relation to fire safety in respect of buildings, including medium to high rise buildings. The fire safety requirements under Part B represent the national statutory minimum standards applicable to the construction of new buildings as well as alterations or certain changes of use.

The fire safety strategy for construction of multi-storey buildings containing flats places emphasis on three elements:

- compartmentation of the building through fire resistant construction of floors and walls – to limit fire spread, and contain fire within the flat of origin;
- protection of the stairway, to ensure it remains free of smoke and fire, and available for use by residents evacuating the building; and
- early detection and alarm in the event of fire, to give early warning to residents.

The fire safety strategy provided for in Technical Guidance Document B – Fire Safety in relation to high-rise buildings includes for two-stage fire detection and alarm systems, with evacuation in the event of activation of second stage fire alarm system.

The work of identifying 842 buildings within the medium and high rise category has been undertaken by local authorities, 291 of which are identified as having certain categories of external cladding. After preliminary consideration, local authorities, using their powers under section 18(6) of the Fire Services Acts, have requested the persons having control of 226 of these buildings to have detailed fire safety assessments carried out.

The fire safety issues associated with external cladding are complex, and a document – *Fire Safety Guidance Note 01 of 2017 - Assessing Existing Cladding Systems in Buildings of More than Six Storeys, or More than 18m in Height* – was developed and circulated to fire authorities and placed on the Department's website as a support for those undertaking assessments of cladding in medium to high rise building.

Work is on-going on the fire safety assessment process and remediation where necessary. However, at this point work is underway to address identified fire safety issues and the combination of contributory factors which apparently gave rise to the Grenfell Tower tragedy in London do not appear to be present in buildings in Ireland.

The experience of actual fires gives confidence that the current fire safety strategy is appropriate and effective in protecting persons living in medium to high-rise buildings. The activation of fire detection and alarm systems, the effective evacuation of the premises, the success of the compartmentation/ construction in containing the fire and the efficacy of the fire service response are all part of the recommended approach to protecting life safety in medium to high rise buildings. The challenge is to ensure that these elements, which contribute to the overall outcome of fire safety, are in place and available in all buildings.

Recommendations

Fire safety strategies in individual buildings involve the passive and active fire protection and building management systems in place. Building management companies and/ or 'persons having control' should maintain a fire safety file containing relevant fire safety information in respect of their buildings. Fire alarm response procedures should be in place and evacuation drills should be practiced in all medium to high rise residential buildings and recorded in the building fire safety register.

Residents of premises containing flats should be informed regarding the strategy and arrangements in place in their particular building. In most buildings and circumstances, the best approach, and the default option, is for all occupants of a building to evacuate to an appropriate assembly point in the event of the fire alarm being activated. Management companies need to actively manage their buildings and fire alarm systems to minimise nuisance alarms which may negate the benefits of the potential early warning of fire.

Fire Safety assessment processes involving 'persons having control' and local authorities are currently underway in 226 medium to high rise buildings. It is recommended that national oversight is maintained of this assessment process in the months ahead and that any emergent issues are dealt with and an oversight

report is provided at the end of the process.

Each fire service should include the buildings identified as part of the survey carried out in response to Circular 05-17 in its programme of Pre-Incident Planning and Familiarisation visits. The lists of medium to high rise buildings should be reviewed by the Station Officer in each fire station area and this list of buildings should be integrated with current pre-fire planning priorities and familiarisation visits should be undertaken in all by end of 2018. (see Chapter 11 on resourcing)

Marker plates containing key information for responding fire services are in use in some jurisdictions and consideration should be given by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to regulating for the provision of adaptations of these systems for fire services in Ireland.

Where the fire safety assessment of a building indicates there are significant fire safety issues, the officers in the relevant fire station(s) should be informed of the situation by Senior Fire Officers and these buildings should be prioritised for pre-fire planning by staff in relevant fire stations.

The task of assembling and integrating “operational intelligence” – information which is accumulated on buildings through different fire service processes – is seen as vital for effective pre-incident planning and fire service response in case of fire incidents. Additional recommendations are made in Chapter 11 about integrating and streamlining all fire service processes and using IT systems to support information harvesting and integration. Fire services where information exchange on priority risk buildings is not happening routinely at officer level should take steps to ensure that this is remedied without delay.

Fire services should review their Pre-Determined Attendances for medium to high rise buildings. If pre-incident planning, the fire safety assessment processes underway or other fire risk assessments identify any specific issues of concern, the Chief Fire Officer should consider designating a specific Pre-Determined Attendance for that building setting out the number, type and order of dispatch of fire appliances to 999/112 calls for that building.

In addition to reviewing Pre-Determined Attendances for high rise buildings in light of information from the identification and risk assessment of medium to high rise buildings, fire services should review their Standard Operational Guidance, (based on national SOG 3.02 Fighting Fires in High Rise), for necessary adjustment of control measures to deal with identified risks.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management should review national Standard Operational Guidance 3.02 in light of information that emerges from the Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire or other relevant incidents and adjust the national template if necessary and re-circulate to fire authorities. Other relevant Standard Operational Guidance such as SOG 3.9 – Fighting Fires in Underground

Car Parks - should also be reviewed.

Fire services in Ireland have 41 aerial appliances with different reach capacity in use currently. All front line appliances carry 13.5m and 10.5m ladders as standard. Although exterior fire-fighting or rescue is unlikely to be a significant factor in fighting fires in medium to high rise buildings, fire services should review the deployment of the aerial appliance fleet with a view to optimising their availability at incidents where they might be used.

Fire service officers who are likely to be Incident Commanders at fires in medium to high rise buildings should undertake appropriate training with periodic refresher training also.

CHAPTER 9 DISCUSSION OF FIRE SAFETY ISSUES

Overview/ Conclusions

In its work, the Task Force identified a number of issues and questions which the members believe need to be addressed. These questions are set out and discussed in Chapter 9 of the Report, and specific proposals and recommendations for dealing with the issues are given in Chapter 10.

While section 18(2) of the Fire Services Acts is clear that responsibility for fire safety rests with the 'person having control' of a building or premises, it is less certain that the 'person having control' is identified or readily identifiable in respect of many buildings.

There is also some ambiguity about the buildings to which the provisions of section 18(2) of the Fire Services Acts apply. While most buildings are taken to be within the remit of this legislation, "dwellings occupied as a single dwelling" are excluded specifically from the provisions of the Acts. However, it is not always clear what constitutes a dwelling occupied as a single dwelling.

As discussed earlier, the question of how well fire safety responsibility is understood by those holding it also requires attention, as does the question of how the person having control of premises can demonstrate that they are complying with their statutory obligations.

The Task Force placed considerable emphasis on how persons who, through ignorance or wilful neglect, are not complying with their statutory fire safety responsibilities can be identified and held to account.

Looking at the situation from a different perspective, the Task Force considered also how the general public, in the form of persons using buildings, can know or be reassured if they are safe from fire while on the premises, how they can report their fire safety concerns to appropriate authorities and if they are aware of their own statutory responsibility not to endanger others through acts or omissions which could result in fire.

In response to the building failures that have emerged over the past decade and following a review of the existing system of Building Control, a Building Control

Reform Agenda has been developed, pursued and substantially progressed. The focus has been on implementing reforms to ensure strong and effective regulation of the building control system; a culture of compliance within the construction industry and effective and efficient oversight by the Building Control Authorities.

- In accordance with the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No.9 of 2014) the owner of a development is required to assign competent persons to design, build, inspect and certify the building works. The competent persons, in turn, account for their contribution through the lodgement of compliance documentation, inspection plans and statutory certificates with the relevant building control authority.
- In parallel with the S.I. No. 9 of 2014, a project is in place in the Local Government Management Agency to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of local Building Control Authorities. A number of enhancements have been delivered to date and others are in progress.
- At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) on a statutory footing. The Bill has been through a number of preliminary scrutiny stages and is now progressing to drafting. The Bill will establish a mandatory statutory register which a builder must be included on in order to carry out works under the Building Control Acts. The CIRI register will be divided into a number of different categories depending on the nature and complexity of the works involved and a builder will have to demonstrate competence in the area, or areas of construction to which his application for registration relates. It is intended that specialist contractors, such as those who carry out specific fire-safety works e.g. fire-stopping will have a specific category.

The issue of fire safety in apartment buildings is also an important one which was discussed at Task Force. It is estimated that up to 500,000 people live in 200,000 apartments across the country. From a fire safety perspective, the 'person having control' of the premises is the Owner/Occupier Management Company, established under Multi-Unit Dwellings legislation.

An important issue in relation to apartments and flats is that "dwellings occupied as a single dwelling" are not subject to the inspection and enforcement provisions of the Fire Services Acts. However, common areas of such buildings are subject to the legislative provisions. The relationship between the 'person having control' of the common area (the building owner or management company) and the owner/ occupier of the individual dwellings occupied as a single dwelling therefore can be a crucial factor for fire safety in apartment block

buildings.

There has been concern about fire safety issues in the apartment sector arising from a number of high profile cases where remediation works have had to be undertaken in apartment buildings. Fears for life safety can sometimes be exaggerated for the situations pertaining. A “*Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings where Concerns Arise*” was developed and published with the aim of balancing understandable fears for life safety in cases where non-compliance with building regulations is present.

The key to life safety in apartment buildings is a proper two-stage fire detection and alarm system as described in Chapter 8, together with an evacuation strategy and involvement of residents in preventing nuisance alarms and knowing how to react in the event of fire alarms being activated.

Where they have become aware of and involved in such cases, local authority fire services work with management companies and other stakeholders to ensure that appropriate levels of fire safety are achieved which minimise the probability of life loss. Actions are based on a case by case fire safety assessment.

The issues in relation to fire safety in apartment buildings may reflect a broader problem in relation to funding of apartment management companies, where there may be significant levels of non-payment of service charges. Without the funding streams from their service charges, Owner Management Companies may be severely limited in their capacity to maintain existing fire protection facilities, let alone to review or tackle other fire safety issues.

Recommendations:

All Senior Fire Officers in local authorities working in the technical fire safety field should aim to achieve Chartered Professional status from one of the relevant profession bodies by the end of 2019.

Consideration should be given to developing an appropriate form of ‘peer review’ of Senior Fire Officers professional decision-making to quality assure work in this area.

Fire Services should ensure that adequate risk prioritised inspections of fire safety measures/ compliance with Part B are carried out by Senior Fire Officers with appropriate professional qualifications as part of the general building control inspection regime.

Other fire officers who are working in less technical fire safety roles should undertake relevant training under the National Directorate for Fire and

Emergency Management/Local Authority Services National Training Group annual programmes.

Fire Services in Ireland should undertake an additional fire risk assessment process of significant premises and buildings and other fire hazards in fire station areas as an approach to complement current Area Risk Categorisation and other risk assessment processes described in Chapters 4 & 5.

When reviewing fire safety in their premises Owner/Occupier Management Companies in apartment blocks should only engage persons with Chartered Professional status to advise them.

Fire Services should offer training to Directors of Apartment Management Companies on key life safety issues including the fire detection and alarm systems, the evacuation procedures and keeping a fire safety file and fire safety register in respect of the building.

Apartment management companies should review the arrangements for ensuring that appropriate fire protection facilities are present within apartments and are checked and maintained routinely, and behaviour which could endanger fire safety or unacceptable practices by residents can be prevented.

Efficient and timely recovery of service charges in apartment blocks needs to be facilitated, so that funding is available to maintain, enhance and replace fire protection facilities.

CHAPTER 10 MOVING FORWARD WITH FIRE SAFETY

Overview/ Conclusions:

The Task Force has concentrated on making the section 18(2) responsibility on the 'person having control' of premises for fire safety into a more practical and effective vehicle for ensuring the fire safety objectives of society, where the probability of disastrous fires is reduced to a minimum, can be achieved.

From the Task Force perspective, the main concern is for life safety and we believe the greatest threat of multiple fatality fire exists currently in certain forms of residential accommodation which have inadequate fire protection facilities and are frequently overcrowded. The buildings within this category therefore should be the first priority for fire safety efforts.

Section 18(2) responsibilities are seen to apply to a broad range of persons. Proposals and recommendations in this Chapter involve looking at those with section 18(2) responsibilities under a number of sub-categories:

- Persons having control of premises of any kind, where the scale and occupancy of the premises do not indicate an undue risk to life from fire, but who nonetheless should take certain actions to demonstrate to the public that they are conscious of their fire safety responsibility and that they provide accessible information to the public about fire safety management in that premises;
- Persons having control of premises which fall within the category of residential premises which are identified as posing the most serious risk to life;
- Persons having control of large scale or complex premises where large numbers of the public are habitually accommodated;
- Persons having control of premises who persistently or wilfully neglect their fire safety responsibilities.

Additional regulatory supports are necessary to underpin national campaigns to enhance and ensure fire safety in the categories of buildings of priority concern.

The fire safety system needs to evolve in a direction where members of the public can be informed and exercise judgement in respect of their own safety.

The legislative provision which enables a fire authority to require a 'person having control' over a premises to have a Fire Safety Assessment prepared in respect of

that premises and submitted to the fire authority is a powerful tool which can be invoked in appropriate situations, but the experience of the assessment of 226 buildings within the medium to high rise category highlights that there are constraints in terms of the capacity of fire engineering professions to provide these.

Recommendations:

The Task Force recommends that a guide be prepared by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and disseminated as part of a campaign to assist those with section 18(2) responsibility to know and understand how to comply with their statutory duties and responsibilities.

The Minister (for Housing, Planning and Local Government) should consider making a new regulation under section 37 of the Fire Services Acts requiring the person having control of all categories of premises to which section 18 (2) applies to prepare a “Public Notice of Fire Safety” containing specified information in respect of the premises, including the name of the person having control of the premises, and to affix this notice at each entrance so that it is legible to the public.

The Minister (for Housing, Planning and Local Government) should consider making additional regulations under section 37 of the Fire Services Acts for certain types of premises within the sleeping accommodation category which are regarded as highest life safety priority. These regulations would require ‘persons having control’ over the specified premises to implement advice and precautions set out in relevant Codes of Practice and Guides to Fire Safety in respect of that category of premises and, specifically, to:

- Have an appropriate working fire detection and alarm system in the premises;
- Provide and maintain proper escape routes from all parts of the premises;
- Ensure doors on escape routes are readily openable from the inside, without use of a key;
- Provide emergency lighting appropriate for the scale and use of the building;
- Provide instructions and guidance for residents on actions to take and arrange practice evacuations; and
- Maintain a fire safety register in respect of the premises.

The Minister (for Housing, Planning and Local Government) should consider make

additional regulations under section 37 of the Fire Services Acts in relation to certain categories of large scale or high risk premises where large numbers of the public can be present. These regulations would provide for:

- Preparing and keeping a Fire Safety File in respect of the premises which records the fire safety strategy on which the building is designed and constructed.
- Having evacuation procedures in place which are exercised periodically;
- Having staff on the premises trained in respect of their roles in fire safety and evacuation;
- Having an appropriate working fire detection and alarm system in the premises;
- Providing and maintaining proper escape routes from all parts of the premises;
- Ensuring doors on escape routes are readily openable, without use of a key;
- Providing emergency lighting appropriate for the scale and use of the building; and
- Keeping a fire safety register in respect of the maintenance of the premises and its fire protection facilities and the fire safety roles of staff and their training and evacuation procedures and drills.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management should develop and publish a guide to preparing a Fire Safety Assessment.

Fire Safety Assessments should be prepared only by those with appropriate qualifications and experience and who are registered with Chartered Member status in one of the appropriate professional institutions.

CHAPTER 11 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Overview/ Conclusions:

While difficulties can be anticipated at implementation stage, the Task Force believes that it is essential to carry through the recommendations in this report if the goal of enhancing fire safety in vulnerable sectors of society is to be achieved.

The Programme to Review and Enhance Fire Safety in Local Authority Provided Traveller Accommodation in 2016, together with the review of fire safety in social housing and medium to high rise buildings described in this report, are examples of the collaboration of central and local government in planning, undertaking and reporting national fire safety campaigns. The experience to date therefore suggests that such campaigns are not just possible, but are effective and appropriate.

The work of the National Directorate has been, heretofore, significantly aimed at supporting local service delivery to achieve the objective of consistency and quality in fire safety and fire services. The success of this model is visible and reported fully in the first EVG Report “Local Delivery – National Consistency” (2016). It is also visible in the successful collaborative development and operation of the national emergency management system put in place and which was used to manage a succession of severe weather and other emergencies, culminating with the response to ex-Hurricane Ophelia in October 2017 and snow-Storm Emma in March 2018.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management will need to devote considerable resources to the legislative/regulatory recommendations herein.

A “National Community Risk Model” is proposed which illustrates how national policy, national development work programmes, national guidance and standards and national support programmes (training, capital, co-ordination) can assist local authorities in the delivery of the elements of the “Local Community Risk Model”.

External validation is a valuable process initiated in 2014 by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management which is a very important part of the feedback loop for national fire risk management activity.

The model of leadership and collaboration between central and local government, which has been established under the aegis of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management, offers a viable and effective alternative to the calls/recommendations for establishing single focus agencies.

Local authorities provide a range of services for their communities. It was viewed as a considerable strength by the Task Force that many of the services which impact on fire safety reside within the local government domain - planning, building control, disabled access, fire services, fire safety, urban development and social housing to name but some of the sections of local authorities. In addition to fire related services they provide, local authorities are also centrally involved in preparation for and response to major emergencies of all kinds. In the case of the four Dublin local authorities, this includes a fire based emergency medical or ambulance service. The possibility of retained fire services providing a first response to assist the National Ambulance Service (NAS) without diminishing their fire service capability is under active consideration. The abilities of fire-fighters to assist/ attend to medical emergencies enhances the overall capacity to respond to incidents involving significant numbers of casualties.

This report is recommending a range of measures which, if adopted, will require resourcing both within local authorities and at national level.

Recommendations

An implementation structure is required which will lead and co-ordinate national fire safety campaigns aimed at what are perceived as the vulnerable residential sectors, and these should be prioritised from a life safety perspective. These fire safety campaigns will require available resources at both national and local level to be re-allocated into this priority sphere and augmented in 2018 and 2019.

Local authorities should work in an integrated fashion in exercising their various regulatory aspects on projects such as planning, building control and fire safety.

The process of joining up individual aspects of fire service activity in a form of a “Local Community Risk Model” or “Unified Risk Model” is recommended to further embed the risk management approach in Irish Fire Services.



An Stúirthóireacht Náisiúnta um Bainistíocht Dólteáin agus Éigeandála
National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

