

Building Safety - Key Messages

In the early days of COVID-19, where 'normal' life as we knew it was changing rapidly, it was difficult to think beyond what would happen the following week. Now, as we emerge from lockdown, we will start to redirect our attention to issues we had been considering prior to the coronavirus.

One of the areas we cannot become complacent about, is building safety. Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has announced his commitment to moving the building safety agenda forward stating:

'The government is bringing about the biggest change in building safety for a generation... Building safety is a priority and the government is supporting industry in ensuring homes are safe at this difficult time.'

Following the publication of the Government's response to the Building a Safer Future consultation in April, we have outlined a number of issues which landlords will need to consider in order to ensure that building safety does not fall off the radar, and instead is given the attention required to ensure residents remain safe in their homes at all times.



Governance -

Board members and Executives should be asking where building safety is on their risk register, with an understanding of the individual building risks within their stock profile. Boards might already be meeting more frequently at this time, this could present the opportunity to ensure that building safety is firmly on the agenda.



Testing -

How is your organisation testing the plans in place to mitigate identified building safety risks? Without a clear method to test your risk assessments, how do you know if they are fit for purpose?



IT infrastructure -

Does your organisation have the appropriate IT infrastructure to manage the data that will be required from the new Building Safety Regulator, to manage the all-important 'golden thread' of information on a building's lifecycle? How are you recording the number of properties that fall within the scope of the new regulator's regime (multi-occupied residential buildings 18m or above, or more than six storeys, whichever comes first)?



Resources and competence -

Does your organisation have the right people in place to make the right decisions? Is there value in developing a training or recruitment plan?



Resident Engagement -

Have you drafted your resident engagement strategy to set out how you will inform and engage residents and involve them in decision making? Does it include a clear complaints procedure to ensure residents can raise issues about the safety of their home?



Building Safety Manager -

Admittedly, requirements around who should be a Building Safety Manager are yet to be confirmed by Government, however, this should not stop you considering who might fulfil this role and what competencies they might require as we do know what duties they will be required to undertake. It is also worth highlighting that it is possible for this role to be shared by more than one person.



Existing buildings -

What can you do now to plan for how you will manage the process of registering existing buildings with the new regulator?



Performance -

How will you monitor performance internally, for example through KPIs and your internal audit programme? Equally, what external auditing regime might you implement?



Costs -

Have you considered cost implications accurately and are these reflected within the current business plan?

With COVID-19 straining operational delivery and presenting a challenge to all our physical and mental wellbeing, it is more important than ever to ensure there is strong leadership within the housing sector. So that this time next year we can look back with pride at all the positive and inspirational work that was achieved, despite working and living alongside a cruel and unforgiving virus.