



Fire Safety in residential high-rise blocks of flats

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: How many high-rise residential blocks of flats does the Council own and manage?

A: The Council has eight (8) residential high-rise blocks of flats:

- Six (6) 10 storey blocks with tenant and leaseholder (private) flats. Three (3) of the blocks of flats are located in the Parks (Milverton Court, Torrington Court and Hatherleigh Court) with the other three (3) in Penhill (Upavon Court, Cleverton Court and Seagry Court)
- A seven (7) storey sheltered housing scheme, George Hall Court located in Park South
- A 21 storey high-rise tower with commercial use to the lower part and residential area with tenant and leaseholder (private) flats located on floors 11 to 19, David Murray John (DMJ), located in the Town Centre



Image above: George Hall Courts, Park South taken on an annual housing tour with tenants.

Q2: When were the Council's high-rise blocks of flats built?

A: All the blocks were built in the 1960's apart from the DMJ which was built in 1975.

Q3: How many flats are there in each high-rise block?

A: 41 flats to each 10 storey block in Parks and Penhill, 32 flats in George Hall Court and 72 flats in the DMJ. A total of 350 flats.

Q4: How many residents live in each block of flats?

A: We know the tenancy details for each flat, but the family make up may change over time; therefore we do not know the exact number in each block.

Q5: How many leaseholders live in the Council's high-rise blocks of flats?

A: We have 29 leaseholders across the eight high-rise blocks of flats.





Q6: How many blocks have been refurbished with the same cladding system used at the Grenfell Tower?

A: None. The Council's 10 storey blocks have brick external walls, George Hall Court has external wall insulation directly fitted to the existing brickwork walls without a cavity. The DMJ tower has the original aluminium and glazing curtain walling system. The construction type for each of the Council's high-rise block of flats prevents the external spread of flames.

Q7: How do you know that the fire will not spread quickly like at the Grenfell Tower?

A: The Council has not used the same external cladding system. The design for fire safety of blocks of flats is based on containing a fire through fire resisting construction (compartmentation for up to 1 hour), which contains the spread of flames in the event of a fire.

The Council's high-rise blocks have been constructed to prevent the spread of flame between compartments. Each flat has fire resisting walls, floors and ceilings to form its own compartment to prevent the spread of flame to another part of the building. The front entrance door is a vital part of the compartment to your flat. Your front entrance door is fitted with a door closer to ensure that it shuts immediately after being opened to maintain the compartmentation of the building.

Q8: How do you know that the compartmentation will operate as designed and contain the spread of flames in the event of a fire?

A: The Council undertakes Fire Risk Assessments to its high-rise blocks of flats annually to assess the risk and record recommendations to ensure compliance with fire safety legislation, which includes checking the fabric of the building, fire doors and fire-stopping to service ducts to maintain the compartmentation, which prevents the spread of flame in the event of a fire.

Q9: Have you had any fires in the Council's high-rise blocks of flats and was the fire contained?

A: Yes, we have had domestic fires to our 10 storey and DMJ blocks of flats which have been contained whilst Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) have extinguished the fire.

Q10: What fire safety precautions do the buildings have in place and are they fully up to date?

A: The Council's fire alarm systems have been fitted to detect a fire in high-rise blocks of flats (in communal areas as well as individual flats), and dry or wet risers assist DWFRS with tackling the spread of fire. CCTV systems installed to bin stores, lifts and fire panels provide extra fire detection. The Council's high-rise flats have been constructed with compartments to prevent the spread of fire within communal areas and between flats.

Q11: Why haven't the Council fitted sprinklers to its high-rise blocks of flats?

A: The Council's Fire Risk Assessments have identified that the construction of its high-rise blocks of flats is adequate to prevent the spread of flame in the event of a fire. We will review any lessons learned from the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry to improve our fire safety to high-rise blocks of flats.

Q12: Is the Council now carrying out an urgent review and if so are you planning to change any of your procedures as a matter of urgency?

A: The Council already has robust procedures which are constantly under review. We are not planning to make any urgent changes to procedures, but will clearly review any lessons learned from the fire at the Grenfell Tower.

Q13: What fire risk assessments are carried out on the buildings and how often do these take place?

A: The Council undertakes a Fire Risk Assessment on an annual basis to ensure that its high-rise blocks of flats are compliant with the current fire safety legislation. The Council has an agreed fire evacuation strategy with DW-FRS and holds bi-monthly meetings with them to discuss fire safety matters and best practice and review lessons learned from all fires to its housing stock.



Image: Swindon Borough Council Housing and Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service training event using Upavon Court in Penhill

Q14: What are the fire alarm arrangements and how often are they tested?

A: The Council has fitted fire alarms to communal areas and all flats in its high-rise blocks of flats.

The fire alarm sound in the DMJ is constant on the floor where a fire has been detected. An intermittent fire alarm sound is activated on the floor immediately below and above the incident which is used to inform tenants and leaseholders to prepare to evacuate.

A fire action notice is displayed on each floor of all the Council's high-rise blocks of flats, which advises tenants and leaseholders on what they should do in the event of a fire.

All fire alarm detectors are fitted with a flashing beacon so that anybody that is hard of hearing is notified that the alarm has been raised.

All fire alarms to high-rise blocks of flats are linked to the Council's Control Room which is operated 24 hours a day. When a fire is detected a message is automatically sent to the Control Room to indicate what alarm has activated and where it is located. The Control Room immediately ring 999 to notify the Fire Service to attend an emergency incident.

CCTV is installed to bin stores, lifts and communal areas by fire panels which are monitored 24 hours a day. Any sign of a fire or smoke in these areas is immediately reported to the Fire Service by ringing 999 for them to attend an emergency incident.

Fire alarms to high-rise blocks are tested weekly to ensure that they function correctly and a more thorough test is undertaken by a specialist contractor on a quarterly basis. Fire alarms record any specific fault or detection to a specific point within the Council's high-rise blocks of flats. The locks to the main entrance communal doors default to allow access when the fire alarm goes off in the Council's high-rise blocks of flats.

Q15: How often do the buildings carry out fire drills and who is responsible in each building for conducting these?

A: In line with common practice for high-rise buildings in the country, drills in the Council's high-rise blocks of flats are carried out on an ad-hoc basis. However, in the light of the fire at Grenfell Tower, the Council is reviewing its fire drill schedule and aims to carry out drills with residents in all its high-rise blocks in the next few weeks.

Q16: Following the fire, what information did the Council provide to residents to reassure them?

A: A Council statement was issued to local media straightaway, and a letter was hand-delivered within a few days of Grenfell Tower fire, to reassure residents and the Swindon community about fire safety in its high rise buildings.



Image: Tenants and Housing Officers visit Hatherleigh Court, Parks on an annual Housing tour.

Q17. If a fire occurred in one of the Council's high-rise blocks; do you have procedures in place to find emergency accommodation for those affected?

A. Yes, we have emergency teams on standby and would find emergency accommodation for anybody that was affected by a fire, where needed.

Q18: Has the Council made any adjustments to fire safety arrangements in the light of any immediate comments received from residents, particularly in relation to the following issues:

- **Installation of sprinkler systems** – we are awaiting further guidance before deciding on whether to fit sprinklers and will include these in any refurbishment works if needed
- **Supply fire blankets extinguishers, and rope ladders** – these are not required and could potentially place residents at increased risk of injury from fire.
- **Clarity over stay put/evacuate procedures** – the Council's fire safety policy recommends:
 - Tenants and leaseholders should evacuate their home only if it is directly affected by smoke or fire – closing all windows and internal doors if safe to do so. It is very important that the front door to the flat is closed fully;
 - if your flat is not involved in fire, residents are recommended to 'stay put' until directed to evacuate – be prepared to move
 - Details are displayed on fire action notices located on each floor of the building
- **Frequency and quality of inspections** – the Council's inspection frequencies are adequate but we will clearly review any lessons learned from the fire at the Grenfell Tower



Please refer to your 'Fire Safety in High Rise Flats' leaflet for 'Stay Put' and 'Evacuation' procedures, as well as hints and tips on how to help keep you, your family and neighbours safe.

If fire safety equipment, such as a smoke alarm or hose is damaged or seems to have been tampered with, please **report it immediately to Housing on 01793 445503**

Do check smoke detectors regularly

Do remain vigilant and report suspicious behaviour to your Neighbourhood Housing Officer or Neighbourhood Warden

Do keep your front access door closed at all times, even in hot weather.