

OpenHouse

The newsletter for Croydon Council tenants and leaseholders

This is a special edition of Open House newsletter about the fire safety steps Croydon Council has taken for its residents in light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. This four-page edition has been delivered to all residents in blocks of three storeys or more.

Sprinklers in council tower blocks by next spring

Work will start this October and finish by next spring on installing fire sprinklers for every resident in the council's 25 tallest tower blocks in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

The sprinklers will go into all individual flats or communal areas of the council's 25 tallest blocks of 10, 11 or 12 storeys, plus sprinklers will also be installed for residents of Fisher Close, an eight-storey sheltered accommodation block in Addiscombe. The council will consider fire safety improvements for other blocks in future in discussion with London Fire Brigade.

The council has begun to plan what kind of sprinklers will be installed, and its contractor Mulalley will ask specialist firms to bid for the work. London Fire Brigade will be involved in the process of deciding which sprinklers are used and where.



At its June cabinet meeting, Croydon was the first London borough after the Grenfell Tower tragedy to announce it will install tower block sprinklers. An update report to July's cabinet meeting has set out when the sprinklers will be installed and other measures the council has taken since the fire.

These include:

- Checks confirming all 39 council tower blocks (six storeys or above) meet fire brigade standards
- Confirmation that its 16 tower blocks with cladding have good-quality, fire-retardant materials
- Update letters and door-to-door visits to all council tower block flats
- The creation of a fire safety board with London Fire Brigade (LFB)
- Initial discussions with LFB about considering sprinklers in future for the council's 13 tower blocks between six storeys and nine
- Fire safety checks on the council's other 1,061 residential blocks of less than six storeys
- A survey of non-residential council buildings

Councillor Alison Butler, cabinet member for homes, regeneration and planning, said: "Croydon Council's first priority after Grenfell was ensuring the safety of our tenants and leaseholders; that's why we double checked your buildings meet fire standards.

"From setting up our fire safety board to installing sprinklers in 25 tower blocks by next spring, this council is doing all it can to limit future fire risk in Croydon by responding robustly to the Grenfell Tower tragedy."

If you would like to join the mailing list for Open House, which is published three times a year, register online at www.croydon.gov.uk/openhouseonline or email your name and address to getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk with the subject title "Open House". Alternatively, contact the resident involvement team via **020 8726 6100**.

Large print: to receive Open House and other housing information in large print, please call 020 8726 6100



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Visit www.facebook.com/croydonresidentinvolvement

Would you like to contribute to Open House?

getinvolved@croydon.gov.uk



Contact the editor

I hope you enjoy reading Open House. If you have any comments to make please email: communications@croydon.gov.uk

Safety, sprinklers and surveys

Croydon's response so far since Grenfell

Residents in council blocks due to get fire sprinklers will receive letters from this September inviting them to advance information sessions before they are installed.

In July, Croydon Council confirmed that work will start in October and end next spring to install sprinklers in its 25 tallest residential blocks of 10, 11 or 12 storeys. An eight-storey accommodation block for elderly people in Addiscombe will also get sprinklers.

The council has already begun the process of getting contractors to bid for the work, and residents will get the chance to ask questions in person to members of the project team at the information sessions. These sessions will include updates relevant to both tenants and leaseholders.

In addition to the council's £10m fire sprinkler investment, Croydon's ongoing response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy has included internal and external fire safety checks of all council residential blocks, all of which meet London Fire Brigade standards. This began with surveys on Croydon's 39 tallest blocks, of which there are 16 with cladding. Council surveys carried out by the council and independent specialists have confirmed that this cladding is different to the kind used on Grenfell Tower. Croydon's cladding is 3mm-thick aluminium panelling with Rockwool insulation, which is good-quality and fire-retardant.

Some additional minor health and safety work has been identified as a result of these inspections, with a three-day turnaround for repairs to some fire doors, wired smoke alarms and replacement battery-powered smoke alarms.

The council's housing team has written and hand-delivered letters to all residents in council blocks of six storeys or higher, as well as going door-to-door and holding a separate series of visits to each block earmarked for fire sprinklers. The council has also written to residents in lower-rise buildings between three and five storeys.



Council contractors checking one of 16 council tower blocks with cladding.

Council letter urges government support on fire safety upgrade



The leader of Croydon Council has written to challenge a senior government minister to contribute towards the borough's forthcoming £10m investment in tower block fire sprinklers.

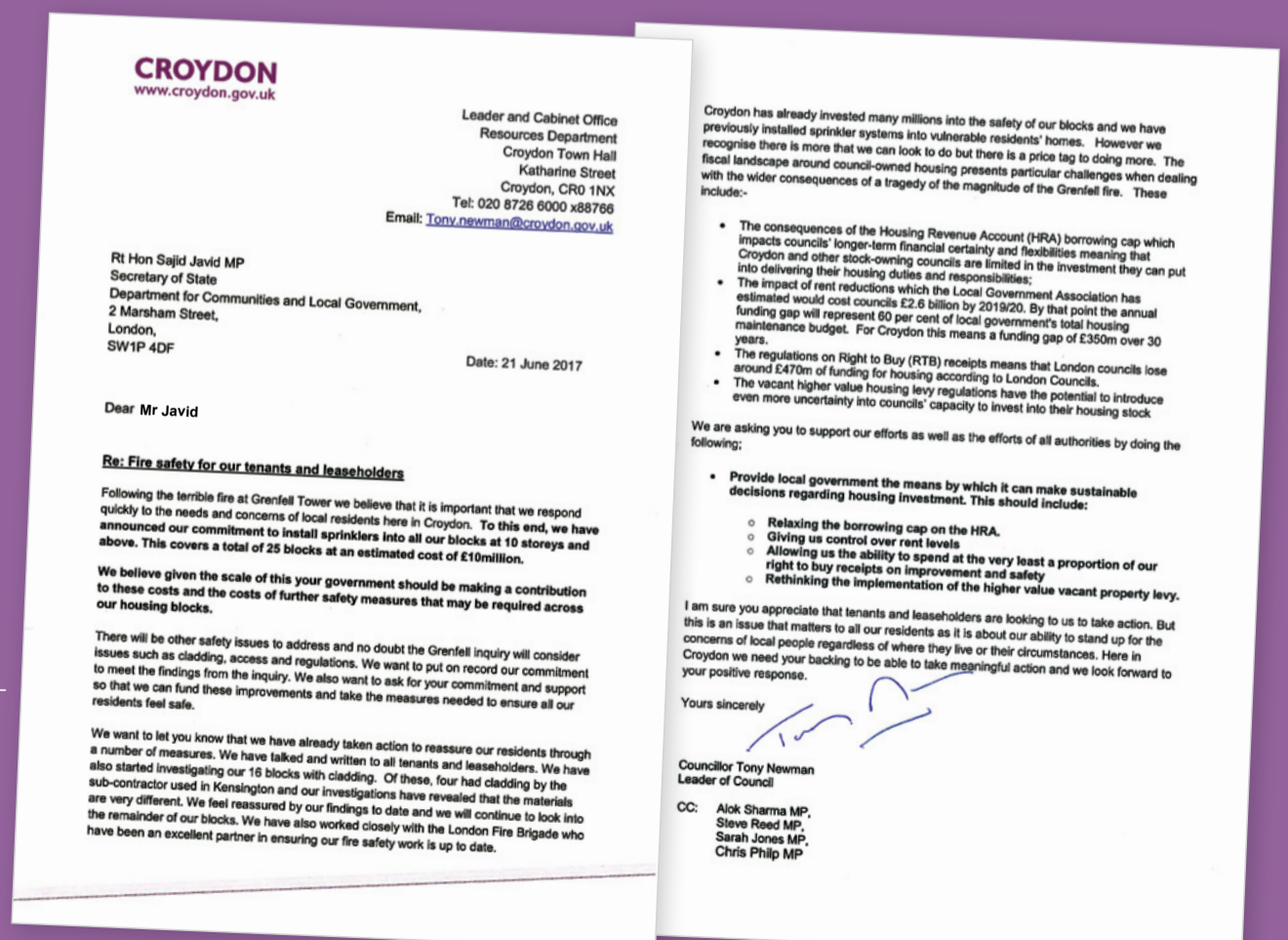
Two days after the 19 June announcement, Councillor Tony Newman called on communities and local government secretary Sajid Javid to contribute towards the sprinklers' cost and for extra powers to spend more money on future improvements.

Councillor Newman wrote: "We believe, given the scale of this, your government should be making a contribution to these costs and the costs of further safety measures that may be required across our housing blocks."

He said that, when dealing with the "wider consequences of a tragedy of the magnitude of the Grenfell fire", there were particular financial challenges in funding council housing. These included a government-imposed 1% cut in council rents that leaves Croydon with a funding gap of around £350m over 30 years.

Councillor Newman concluded: "Here in Croydon we need your backing to be able to take meaningful action and we look forward to your positive response."

At the time of printing this special edition of *Open House*, the council had yet to receive a reply from the Department for Communities and Local Government.



Residents and fire safety

what you need to know

Croydon Council has launched a series of drop-in sessions aimed at informing tenants and leaseholders about how they can help maintain good fire safety in their block.

Throughout July, housing officers have been visiting residents across the borough giving updates on work the council has carried out in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, from inspections on the highest buildings to announcing the forthcoming investment in sprinklers across 25 blocks.

At the time of printing this newsletter, almost all of the visits had been done. If you have not yet had your session, you will receive a flyer two days in advance. If you missed any of the visits, below are some of the subjects that have been discussed with tenants and leaseholders, from fire safety tips to insurance advice.



A fire safety session outside a block in Chertsey Crescent

Visiting your block to update residents

Throughout July a team of council officers visited all our taller blocks to talk to residents about our approach to fire safety.

The team set itself up outside the block entrances. Residents asked the officers about a range of questions including the fitting of sprinkler systems, fire doors and arranging for the fire service to carry out a fire safety visit. There was also an opportunity to raise issues with the local tenancy officer or caretaker, as well as a chance to report repairs.

If you missed the visit to your block or want to report any fire safety issues, contact your caretaker or tenancy officer, email contact-the-council@croydon.gov.uk or telephone **020 8726 6000**.

Tips and support for leaseholders

Leaseholders are responsible for the maintenance of the interior of their flats. The council would encourage all leaseholders to fit smoke alarms and request a free fire safety visit from London Fire Brigade. You may be eligible to receive smoke alarms fitted in your home for free, where necessary, if you request a home fire safety visit.

The London Fire Brigade's website (www.london-fire.gov.uk) has a range of useful advice and information, including fire safety information, a home risk assessment escape plan section and how to book a home fire safety visit.

If you privately rent your property from a leaseholder, please be aware that it is a legal requirement for your landlord to have a smoke alarm installed. The fire brigade recommends a minimum of one on each floor of the property.

Council sets up fire safety board

Croydon Council has launched a fire safety board to review all its buildings alongside senior members of London Fire Brigade (LFB).

The board meets regularly to review work done so far by teams across the council since the fire in Kensington, and its job is to ensure targets are met and to plan ahead. Its focus also includes overseeing future fire safety in updating and strengthening council policies, checking fire alarms and encouraging private landlords and businesses to do their own safety reviews.

Croydon Council is working closely with LFB, whose fire officers will continue to do regular checks on council buildings and speak to residents.

The board is made up of council staff covering areas including housing, estate management and community safety, plus senior representatives from LFB. As its work programme develops, the board could expand to include representatives from other sectors.

How residents can help with fire safety

Please take note of the following guidelines:

- Make sure that nothing is left on landings, stairwells or outside blocks, including buggies, scooters and bikes. Any items left in communal areas pose both a fire risk and a safety risk.
- Don't wedge open fire doors (including communal doors such as those in the lobby or stairwells and your own front door). Fire doors are designed to limit the spread of fire.
- Don't leave communal windows open.
- Don't lock bikes to railings where they can obstruct fire exits.
- Ensure that rubbish is kept in your flat until you are ready to dispose of it properly – do not leave bags outside your front door.
- Don't smoke on landings, stairwells or in other communal areas.
- Be very careful about security and who you allow to enter your block.
- You can also book a free home visit from LFB. Visit www.london-fire.gov.uk
- Tenants without a working smoke detector can contact Axis on **020 8726 6101**



A bicycle left blocking access to fire safety equipment

Council rolls out scooter storage

Croydon Council has begun an ongoing programme of building mobility scooter storage to improve fire safety in its residential blocks.

More and more residents in council blocks are using scooters to maintain their independence for longer. However, London Fire Brigade warns that the risks associated with storing and charging mobility scooters in communal areas create a potential fire hazard.



The first blocks to get scooter storage will be Layton Crescent, Allington Court and Southlands Close. Layton Crescent and Allington Court will be complete by the end of July, and work will start at Southlands Close soon.

The storage solution will be appropriate for each block; some units will be built internally by adapting an available area, while others will be outside.

Anybody thinking of buying a scooter should contact their tenancy officer, prior to purchase, to obtain the necessary permission from the council.

Calling council tenants – have you got home contents insurance?

No one wants to imagine being personally affected by a fire, flood or burglary, but if the worst should happen are your belongings insured? The cost of replacing or repairing lost, stolen or accidentally damaged possessions such as furnishings, clothing or electrical items could run into thousands of pounds.

So why take the risk of being without home contents insurance when you can get peace of mind knowing that proper insurance could take care of the costs of replacing or repairing your possessions?

You can arrange your own home contents insurance or apply for the council-run scheme. Croydon Council has teamed up with Allianz to bring you contents insurance that you can pay at very reasonable rate each week. This will make it a little easier to manage than finding a large lump-sum payment.

To apply, you must have a clear rent account and complete an application form. The insurance premiums are cheaper than many other insurance companies offer. For example, premiums for home contents to the value of between £10,000 and £35,000 range from £1.56 to £5.47 per week, according to the amount of cover needed.

For a home contents insurance scheme information booklet and application form, visit <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/housing/counciltenants/insurance>, email housingrentaccounting@croydon.gov.uk or call **020 8726 6100** ext. **15227**.

Your housing caretakers: your eyes and ears

James Butler and Paul Brazill are two of our housing caretakers. James has been a caretaker for five years and works in the Selhurst area. Paul has worked as a caretaker for over three years and works in the north of the borough. Open House caught up with them for fire safety advice.

OH: How many blocks of flats do you look after?

J&P: Between us we look after four high-rise blocks and 35 low-rise blocks. We have to ensure the blocks are clean, report any communal repairs, check the lighting and ensure that the bin areas are clear. Of course, we also have a role to play in keeping all blocks safe.

OH: What safety checks do you carry out?

J&P: We carry out a daily visual inspection of all the communal areas of our high-rise blocks: hallways, landings, lifts and stairwells. We make sure that there are no obstructions blocking the fire exits and that fire doors and windows have not been wedged open. We also check for fly-tips. Low-rise blocks are checked on a weekly basis. Our managers who monitor our work also carry out their own checks.

OH: What is the most challenging aspect of keeping the blocks safe?

J&P: Keeping the landings and communal areas clear. We regularly have to ask residents to move bikes and buggies. Bags of rubbish and plant pots also present a hazard. It is important that escape routes are kept clear. If residents continue to obstruct communal areas we will refer the matter to the tenancy officer who will take legal action or dispose of the items. If we can't find the owner, a letter will be sent to all residents requesting removal within 48 hours. If they are not claimed, we remove the items and store them for a short period before disposing of them.

OH: How can residents help you in your role?

J&P: By keeping communal areas clear of any obstructions. Also keeping any fire doors closed and reporting any concerns about fire safety to us immediately. Be very careful about



security and who you allow to enter your block. We would also recommend that you arrange for a free fire safety visit from the fire brigade.

OH: Do you keep any records of the monitoring you carry out?

J&P: We send daily emails to our manager to confirm that checks have been carried out and to flag up any potential issues that need addressing. We also complete weekly fire safety forms which are checked and retained by our manager.

OH: Have you had any fire safety training?

J&P: Fire safety training is an integral part of the induction training for new caretakers, with a focus on how to spot potential fire risks in blocks.

OH: What happens if you are on leave?

J&P: The work is covered by stand-in caretakers who ensure all the necessary checks are carried out.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR CARETAKER MANAGER

If you have anything you would like to raise in relation to your block, your caretaker manager can be contacted as follows:

TERRY EDWARDS

020 8726 6100 Ext:18193

- Bridge Place
- College Green
- Garnet Road
- Gillett Road
- Grosvenor Road
- Wingate Crescent

KINGSLEY EZE

020 8726 6100 Ext:15265

- Academy Gardens
- Fisher Close
- Gordon Crescent
- Havelock House
- Stroud Green Gardens
- Windmill Bridge House

ADRIAN NUNES

020 8726 6100 Ext:18301

- Bramley Hill
- Cromwell House
- Heathfield Gardens
- Keeling Court
- Messer Court
- Morris Court
- Violet Lane

CHIMA WABARA

020 8726 6100 Ext:15228

- Beech House
- Cedar House
- Chertsey Crescent
- Lodge Lane

PRINCE EGEKWU

020 8726 6100 Ext:18153

- Dartmouth House
- Mayday Road
- Regina Road
- Sevenoaks House
- Tonbridge House

Low-rise block residents can call **020 8726 6000**

How you can help, by Croydon's fire commander

Grenfell Tower was without doubt one of the most challenging fires London Fire Brigade has ever had to deal with and our thoughts remain with everyone affected by this tragic incident.

Following a fire on such an unprecedented scale, it's understandable that people who live in high rises have questions about their safety.

Thankfully, fires are rare but London Fire Brigade has reissued practical guidance about high-rise safety and I would urge everyone to read it.

Fire safety in purpose-built flats and maisonettes is dependent upon good maintenance of the building and housekeeping of the common areas. Residents should know the following:

- All flat front doors and doors on corridors and staircases must be 'self-closing' fire doors.
- Fire doors must not be held or wedged open as they are designed to stop the spread of fire.
- Things must not be stored in corridors or staircases as this can fuel a fire, block your escape route and stop firefighters doing their job.

If you have any fire safety concerns about your building you should also always make them known to your landlord – in this case the council – so they can act on them.

You should also make sure you have a plan in place if there is a fire and that everyone in your home knows what to do in an emergency.

What to do if there is a fire in your block

For people living in a high-rise or purpose-built flats, this is our advice:

- If the fire is actually inside your own flat or maisonette, leave immediately and call 999.
- If there is a fire or smoke inside your flat or maisonette and your escape route is NOT clear, it may be safer to stay in your flat or maisonette until the fire brigade arrives.
- Find a safe room away from the fire, close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop smoke entering the room. Go to a window, shout "HELP, FIRE" and call 999.
- If there is a fire in another part of your building while you are inside your purpose-built flat or maisonette, and you're not affected by the fire, stay put and call 999.
- You are usually safer staying put in your own flat or maisonette unless heat or smoke is affecting you.
- A self-contained, purpose-built flat or maisonette will typically give you between 30 and 60 minutes protection from fire.

Good advice for every home is:

Homes need multiple smoke alarms. Ideal spots for smoke alarms include rooms where you leave electrical equipment running like satellite boxes, computers or heaters; any room where you smoke or use candles, and anywhere you charge any electrical items such as mobile phones or laptops.

As a minimum, you should have smoke alarms on every floor in your hallway or landings, plus a heat alarm in the kitchen and they should be tested weekly.

You should also make sure that you have fire safety measures in place by thinking about preventing fires starting in the first place. Always take care with cigarettes, cooking and candles, and check your electrical products are in good working order.

You can find more fire safety information at www.london-fire.gov.uk



David Lindridge, London Fire Brigade's Borough Commander for Croydon