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LONG-LEASEHOLDERS RESIDENTS GROUP WELCOMES NEW FIRE SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR FLATS IN ENGLAND & WALES

Following pressure from the FPRA and others the new fire safety guidance has been published today which will hopefully improve fire safety in blocks of flats.

The Federation of Private Residents Association along with a variety of industry professionals have been working with The Local Government Group who were commissioned to put together specialist advice which will be used for social and private landlords, risk assessors, fire officers and others in the housing sector.

This new guidance which runs to 191 pages can be used alongside existing advice on housing fire safety published in 2008. As well as dealing with new-build, repair and refurbishment in flats, it will also tackle issues surrounding vandalism.

Federation Chairman and member of the reference group Bob Smytherman said:

“Ever since The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 was approved by Parliament on 7th June 2005 and came in to law on 1st October 2006 those of us responsible for fire safety in blocks of flats have been calling for clear, comprehensive and unambiguous fire safety guidance and I am delighted that we have been able to inform the new guide.”

“The previous advice covered most types of property, but it was never sufficient for common parts of blocks of flats and some landlords and residential management companies which are often run by volunteer Directors were unsure of their legal responsibilities in such buildings. This was also compounded by fire risk assessors being unclear about the level of investigation required when carrying out risk assessments, which often led to confusion over

the need for things like fire fighting equipment, alarm systems and emergency lighting in the common ways."

"This new guidance should resolve many of these issues and help make sure everyone involved in the leasehold sector know exactly what they have to do so residents are made as safe as possible without being burdened with increased bureaucracy or inflated services charges as unscrupulous managing agents and landlords opt for expensive and unnecessary fire alarm systems."

ENDS

The guidance is available on the LG Group website via the web link below.

www.local.gov.uk/fire-safety-guidance

Or alternatively a pdf copy of the guidance for fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats is available on request.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

"Housing – fire safety: guidance on fire safety provisions in certain types of existing housing" was published in 2008 by Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services, now Local Government Regulation, in partnership with the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. The guidance was designed to help regulators and landlords understand the requirements of the Housing Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which was approved by Parliament on 7 June 2005, and came in to law from 1st October 2006.

The main effect of the changes was to move towards greater emphasis on fire prevention in all non-domestic premises, including communal parts of blocks of flats but NOT the flats themselves.

Fire certificates were abolished and have no legal status.

Responsibility for complying with the Fire Safety Order rest with the 'responsible persons'.

In many blocks this will probably be the Company Directors, or any other person who may have control of the communal parts of the premises. If there is more than one responsible person, all must take all reasonable steps to work with each other.

The responsible person has to carry out a fire risk assessment, which must focus on the safety in case of fire of all 'relevant persons'. In most blocks this will be residents and visitors to the building. It should pay particular attention to those at special risk, such as the disabled and those with special needs, and must include consideration of any dangerous substance likely to be on the premises. Your fire risk assessment will help you identify risks that can be removed or reduced and to decide the nature and extent of the general fire precautions you need to take to protect people against the fire risks that remain, currently **ONLY** if a block employs five or more people must you record any significant findings of the assessment, although we strongly recommend to our members to keep records of any assessments that are made.

This new guidance commissioned and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government published **today**.

Local Government Improvement and Development will lead on the sector-led project with consultants Colin Todd Associates.

The Electricity Safety Council also contributed financially. Once ready the document will be made available on request as a free internet download

Local Government Improvement and Development and Local Government Regulation are parts of the Local Government Group.

The FPRA is a non-political, not-for-profit advice, support and lobbying organisation for our members who include private residential leaseholders, tenants' and residents' associations and residential management companies as well as those companies where the leaseholders together own the freehold of their own residential block.

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