

Draft High-Rise Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2026

Foreword – Jackie Hollywell

Introduction ‘The heart of a town lies in its people’

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) is committed to making sure all our residents both *are* safe and *feel* safe within their own homes by listening and working with residents as well as being open and transparent in our decision making. SBC values the input residents have and by building strong relationships, we aim to deliver a sustainable service that meets local housing need and considers the residents’ voice.

‘More social and affordable good quality homes’ is one of the five priorities in the Councils Corporate Plan **‘Making Stevenage Even Better’**. We recognise that this can be better achieved by working with those who are best placed to tell us what works well for them and how we can improve.

The Building Safety Act 2022 introduces new regulatory responsibilities for organisations that own and manage high- rise blocks to ensure that the fire and structural safety of the buildings is being effectively managed. The management of building safety in ‘higher risk buildings’ applies to buildings over 18 metres or more in height, or seven or more stories, containing at least two flats.

SBC has five high-rise residential flat blocks that are in scope of the Building Safety Act and the regulations it introduces. These are listed below;

- Brent Court
- Harrow Court
- The Towers
- High Plash
- Highcroft

This Strategy is SBC’s commitment to genuine partnerships with residents to deliver a great housing service and to provide safe homes. We will demonstrate how we intend to increase influence by using what residents tell us, as well as their local knowledge, to shape and improve our housing services and therefore increase confidence and satisfaction in our performance as a landlord.

This document serves as a practical demonstration of the approach outlined in the Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027. It will allow for an ongoing perspective around not only building safety but will also serve as a testbed for a wider implantation of our attitude to all housing engagement and involvement. In this Strategy we will demonstrate how we intend this to be achieved.

For the purposes of this Strategy, the term ‘resident’ refers to all tenants and leaseholders living in Stevenage Borough Council owned properties or those accessing the Council’s housing service.

Aims of our Strategy:

- Ensure residents living in SBC's high-rise blocks can play an effective role in ensuring their building continues to be safe
- Set out how residents can get involved in achieving this and the benefits of doing so
- Identify building safety information residents want and need and how they wish to be provided with it
- Improve the way SBC talks to and listens to residents about the safety of their block and individual homes
- Outline both resident and council responsibilities for keeping the blocks and homes safe
- Show how success of the Strategy will be measured and any improvements made

Our main objectives are to:

- Continually improve the safety of our buildings
- Help residents understand how building safety risks and decisions affect them
- Improve accessibility to information, ensuring residents know how to request building safety information and that it's accurate
- Explore cost-effective ways to improve awareness and understanding of building safety information.

One of the most important messages of this Strategy is that if any person has any concerns about building safety, even if they consider them to be minor, that they contact us and inform us at the earliest opportunity.

Tel; 01438 242242

Email Fire.safety@stevenage.gov.uk

Website www.stevenage.gov.uk

Post Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage SG1 1HN

What is building safety?

Building safety is about managing and controlling risks that could cause injuries to those people within our buildings. Not only to residents but also employees and members of the public or any persons visiting them.

Risks associated with buildings tend to be (but are not limited too) fire safety, structural safety, electrical safety, and gas safety.

One of the duties identified by the Building Safety Act is the role of the Principal Accountable Person and the Accountable Person, both of which can be the organisation or person who owns or has a legal obligation for maintaining the common parts of a building, for example the corridors or lobbies. This can be the Freeholder, Landlord, Management Company, Right to Manage Company or

Commonhold Association. In the case of Council owned properties, SBC acts as both.

Therefore, SBC has a duty to take reasonable steps to:

- Prevent building safety risks occurring relating to spread of fire and structural failure
- Reduce the seriousness of an incident if one occurs
- Register SBC's existing high-rise buildings with the Building Safety Regulator
- Prepare a Safety Case Report for each high-rise building detailing that all building safety risks are being addressed and reasonable measures are in place to control them

It is really important that SBC holds up to date information on residents and their households who live in high-rise blocks so we can incorporate personal emergency evacuation plans where residents may struggle in an emergency or if an incident occurs. If you know of any vulnerabilities or impairments that may prevent you from evacuating quickly and safely, SBC should be informed at the earliest opportunity.

How will we ensure building safety is achieved?

Both SBC and everyone living in or visiting a high-rise block has a responsibility for keeping them safe and preventing issues that may lead to a fire or issues impacting the safety of other residents. SBC will carry out regular building and property inspections in accordance with the current industry standards and regulations and develop a clear and open process which will be readily available for residents to view. This will allow us to identify building safety risks early.

As the landlord, SBC has a responsibility to ensure the block is well maintained and to carry out independent fire risk assessments. General maintenance includes tasks such as regular cleaning and repairs and ensuring that communal areas are safe and well-lit. A fire risk assessment is a systematic evaluation of potential risks and hazards within a building that could lead to a fire, and it includes actions to mitigate these risks to ensure the safety of residents.

SBC also needs to ensure that residents are fully informed of any changes to the fire and building safety information regarding their block. To support this, building safety training sessions will be made available to everyone living in high-rise accommodation to help enhance the joint work between SBC and residents to identify safety issues. All issues will be treated seriously and will be rectified as quickly as possible.

How can residents help us?

Residents in the blocks have an obligation to work with SBC to keep their building safe and to inform the landlord of any known safety concerns. To maintain safe living conditions, SBC relies on the good will and co-operation of residents and visitors in so much as:

- Residents should not act in a way that creates a significant risk of fire or structural failure (keeping communal areas free from personal belongings that may cause a fire risk or obstruction in the event of an emergency).
- Residents should not interfere with relevant safety systems such as fire alarms and extinguishers, safety notices, smoke alarms, automatic door closures and sprinkler systems etc.
- Residents should comply with information and access requests from the Accountable Person that is required to assess and manage building and fire safety risks.
- Residents should contact us if they identify any damaged, removed or faulty fire safety measures. We urge residents to test their fire alarms on a weekly basis and to keep their fire doors in good working order. Any issues with these must be reported to SBC as soon as possible to ensure these can be repaired.
- Residents are reminded they are not to make any unauthorised changes to their properties without prior approval from SBC. This is especially important when dealing with life saving components of properties.

The best approach to ensuring building safety for all is one of collaboration, built on trust and joint responsibilities. For SBC to achieve legal compliance and a thorough safety framework, periodically access will be required to homes to carry out essential checks and maintenance. SBC will always try to achieve this by working in partnership with residents and by giving at least 48 hours notice in writing as to when an accountable person or contractors need access to their home or part of the building. Usually this arrangement is successful however, on occasions where access is denied SBC will take a graded approach to access which will include;

- Reasonable attempts as access by appointment (letter, telephone, text message and visits).
- Warning letters
- As a last resort and where all reasonable attempts have failed, SBC may find it necessary to instigate legal action via the tenancy or leasehold agreement.

‘The neighbourhoods of Stevenage are places where residents are proud to live in, feel safe and well and prosper, and where communities, SBC and other organisations work together (co-operatively) to make things better.’

Committed to engaging with residents on building safety decisions

For the first time, it is a statutory requirement for a Resident Engagement Strategy to be produced for high-risk buildings. The key purpose of this Strategy is for all residents aged 16 and over to be encouraged to participate in the making of building safety decisions. The Strategy helps SBC to set out:

- What information will be provided to residents
- What decisions they will be consulted on
- How residents' views will be considered; and
- How the appropriateness of consultation undertaken will be measured

In the preparation of this Strategy, SBC consulted with residents through surveys, workshops and pop-up sessions as well as knocking on doors. Much of the feedback received related to repairs and maintenance, unrestricted access to the blocks and door entry systems not being fit for purpose. This feedback has been used to;

- Commission new communal entrance doors and intercom systems to improve the safety of the blocks. This is currently being rolled out across two high-rise blocks with the others to be completed by the end of 2024/25.
- Identify a fire door replacement programme to individual properties which will be procured and delivered by the end of 2024/25.
- Piloting digital signage to enhance our messaging.
- Secure £200K Safer Streets funding to deliver the 'Build a Better Bedwell' partnership. This funding has provided additional resources to monitor some of our high-rise blocks and deter ASB as well as upgrade and improve CCTV. The money will also provide activities in linked locations to enhance the social benefits of living in our high-rise accommodation.
- Secure UK Shared Prosperity Funding to improve communal rooms in blocks which can be used for resident engagement opportunities linked to building safety as well as other services that we provide.
- Provide weekly opportunities for drop-in sessions at Brent Court and Harrow Court with our Neighbourhood Wardens so residents can report issues and provide feedback on all our services.

SBC will further consult with all residents of high-rise accommodation on this draft Strategy before finally adopting and publishing it and will use a range of methods in which to do so, considering tenant preferences that have been collected during the initial consultation and through tenant profiling.

Future consultation

SBC proposes to consult residents every two years on the updating of this policy. However, in certain situations it may be necessary for us to do this sooner. This could be for one of the following situations:

- Building safety risk(s) considered an intolerable risk – these are things which may result in extreme harm or injury.
- Where works are considered a substantial material alteration to the building because of an identified building safety risk which needs to be dealt with quickly.
- Works that will result in a significant disturbance to residents.
- If the duration of potential works is likely to exceed 30 days or will require more than ten people on site at once. For significant material alterations such as external wall remediation or major works such as roof replacements or structural strengthening works.

In addition to the above SBC are required to inform residents of works being undertaken and the purpose of the works in the following situations:

- When a building safety decision has been made to proceed with building works and SBC are the Principal Accountable Person.
- Where works will take place for a period of more than one day arising from a building safety decision that will limit access to any part of a building, or otherwise cause a nuisance to residents. In these situation we are required to consult relevant persons about the days and times when works are to take place and how we propose to minimise and mitigate the disruption caused to them.

When Consultation will not be possible

Whilst SBC's intention is to consult with residents whenever feasible, sometimes this may not be possible. This would usually be in case of emergency works being needed urgently or because of a change to the evacuation policy of the building, as recommended by a competent engineer, for example, structural or fire.

Understanding our residents

A key component of a Building Safety Case Report details how well SBC knows the residents living within our high-rise buildings. This means that we need to understand the profile and needs of every household to prepare appropriate evacuation procedures for them, but in particular our disabled, impaired or vulnerable residents. We will do this as a commitment to good practice, even if guidance from government does not require it. Residents are provided with reassurance that their data is secure and being used for building safety purposes, although it will also be used to update household tenancy and leasehold records.

SBC's approach is founded not on the principle of telling our residents that they are safe, but rather about asking them if they feel safe. Success also relies on SBC regularly updating fire safety information and the methods used to do this. SBC aims to build trust with residents by co-creating our engagement strategies with them.

SBC will also work with other key stakeholders and trusted community partners in the borough to ensure the voices of the residents are heard and to engage successfully with them. The aim is that over time, each high-rise or complex building in the borough, is represented either by block champions or by residents' associations. The deployment of digital engagement tools will create new opportunities for engagement, particularly with younger tenants.

Communicating with residents

To deliver the aims of the Strategy SBC will use a range of methods to inform and gain feedback from residents ensuring we do all we can to make sure we cater for the needs of every resident – for example those with disabilities, those who are not online and where English is not their first language.

Methods SBC will use to communicate with residents are:

- Face to face at the start of tenure
- Stevenage Borough Council website

- Dedicated building safety web page
- Community noticeboards
- Text
- Emails/letters
- Pop up sessions to talk about building safety
- Community events
- Neighbourhood meetings/walkabouts/surgeries

How will we know engagement has been successful?

How far SBC meets the expectations of regulatory requirements and deliver this Strategy effectively will partly be measured through the new suite of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's).

Three of the twelve satisfaction measures relate specifically to resident engagement and include perception on whether landlords are **listening and acting** on tenants' views, **keeping tenants informed** and **treating tenants fairly and with respect**.

These measures will be included in our enhanced set of housing Key Performance Indicator's (KPI's) and additional insight will be overlaid to give deeper insight on how we may improve.

We will also measure success by tracking progress of our Building Safety Act Implementation Plan and tracking the experience and outcomes of those involved in both formal and informal engagement mechanisms.

Progress will be monitored by our Executive Housing Working Group and updates are also received at the Councils Corporate Health and Safety Group and through the Annual Housing Performance Report.

Information we'll provide to our residents

As residents move into SBC's high-rise blocks, they will be provided with building safety and fire safety instructions explaining what to do in the event of a fire and recommended actions to reduce fire spread.

As well as this, in accordance with regulations 9 and 10 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order 2005) SBC provides residents annually with the following:

- How to report a fire
- A reminder of what the evacuation strategy is for the building they live in
- Any other information that tells residents what they must do once a fire has occurred, based on the building's evacuation strategy
- The importance of keeping fire doors closed
- Reminders that doors and self closures are not tampered with
- Any faults/damage to fire doors are raised immediately
- Clear and prominent signage and instructions within the locality of the high-rise building including emergency exits

Additional Building Safety Activity

As part of SBC's routine safety checks on flat blocks we carry out the following tests on the blocks which require them;

- Producing Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICRs) every five years in both our residential domestic properties and communal areas.
- Emergency light tests in all blocks of flats, monthly and annually.
- Undertake fire risk assessments either annually or biannually depending on the height and risk of the building.
- Executing communal and fire door inspections (for buildings 11m+/five storeys+) within the communal area and property front doors of residents.
- Performing firefighting equipment checks.
- Completing gas servicing and safety checks. Every one of SBC residential property will have an annual gas check. Leaseholders are responsible for obtaining their own check as part of their leasehold agreement.
- Implementing lifting equipment thorough examinations and planned maintenance visits. All SBC lifts will be serviced and maintained regularly.
- Conducting Legionella Risk Assessments.

The frequency of our planned safety activities is dependent on the building type. Residents can request further information about the planned safety activities listed above and how it relates to the common parts of their own property.

Reactive Building Assessments.

Occasionally SBC may need to undertake reactive building assessments – this will be when a building safety risk is reported and it needs to be investigated as soon as possible or if there is a change in guidance or legislation. SBC will endeavour to provide residents with at least three working days notice if an assessment is required. Residents will also be updated with the outcomes of the assessment or inspection and a remedial action plan within a timely manner.

The update will include the following

- The potential impact the building safety risk could have on residents and visitors
- The potential impact of any remediation works to residents and visitors
- Additional compliance activities needing to be commissioned
- Changes in inspection frequencies
- Temporary measures to ensure the safety of those in the building
- Contact information for submitting questions or concerns to SBC employees

Sharing, retaining and requesting information

SBC want to be open and honest with our residents and as such we will share the most recent and up to date documents in relation to building safety.

Historical records can be requested and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. SBC will retain information relating to building safety for as long as it remains relevant to identifying, assessing, and managing building safety risks.

We strive to provide an accessible service for all our residents and would like everyone to have full access to this document so they can clearly understand our obligations and actions. If we can adjust our service to better support any resident, we would urge them to contact us directly and we will do all we can to help.

Examples of information we will share once requested	Examples of Information we will consider sharing
Statutory Building Assessments/Certificates and checks: including but not exclusively <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fire Risk Assessments - Building Safety Risk Assessments - Legionella Assessment - Asbestos Surveys - Gas safety certificates 	Surveys and inspection reports, such as PAS9980, Type 4 Risk assessments, structural surveys. (the report will either be shared in its entirety or a summary)
Fire safety Information, including but not inclusive, evacuation policies, fire door information, what to do in the instance of a fire.	Procurement and Contractor information
Building Safety Complaints record	EWS1 forms if relevant for the building.
Prescribed documents – mandated by the Building Safety regulator, Health and Safety Executive and Fire Rescue Services.	
Resident Engagement Strategy	Results and data of surveys
Mandatory occurrence reporting	
Landlord certificate and prescribed supporting documentation	

We will not provide any information which contains personal information on any of our residents or staff.

Complaints Under the Building Safety Act 2022

A “relevant complaint” about building safety may relate to:

- A building safety risk to a specific building
- The performance or behaviours of an Accountable Person in fulfilling its duties under the Building Safety Act 2022.

SBC adopts a formal complaints process which can be accessed by anybody who is unhappy about the standard of a service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf that affects an individual resident or group of residents, or other users of our service.

We'll make sure all residents know how to raise a building safety issue and how their concern will be addressed.

All complaints related to building safety can be submitted via our standard complaints process. The Council operates a two-stage complaints procedure, and if you remain dissatisfied you can refer the issue to the Housing Ombudsman Service or the Building Safety Regulator.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are as follows:

Online form:

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Via telephone:

0300 1113000 (9:15-5:15pm Mon-Fri)

Via email:

Info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

In writing:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

For more details on the role and responsibilities of the new Building Safety Regulator and how to contact them, please visit www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety/regulator.