Fire Safety Policy

The Fire Safety Policy sets out how Dartford Borough Council will manage fire safety risk in its buildings and communal areas.

2024

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This Policy sets out how Dartford Borough Council ('The Council') will manage fire safety risk in its buildings and communal areas. The Council will focus on fire prevention measures designed to eliminate or reduce fire hazards in our premises, thereby providing a safe environment, reducing the likelihood of a fire occurring, and the impact of any fire should one occur. In aiming to deliver this environment, the Council will seek to identify, assess and reduce risks to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO).

1.2. The Council's fire safety process includes management of the fire protection and safety systems and equipment, plus a pro-active regime of assessment of its properties, known as Fire Risk Assessment (FRA).

1.3. The Council is committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect its residents, visitors, guests, contractors, and those near to its properties from the effects of fire.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. This Policy aims to establish how fire safety will be managed and communicated by the Council. It sets out the roles of Dartford Borough Council Officers who have been assigned specific duties and responsibilities, and the robust procedures in place to deliver the Policy requirements.

2.2. The key objectives of this Policy are to:

- Manage the process to ensure that fire risk assessments are completed for every property that meet the requirements of the regulations;
- Maintain an up-to-date record of activity and findings from assessments, including any actions, repairs, changes or improvements;
- Monitor the activity to ensure that any required actions are completed in a timely and appropriate manner;
- Provide effective fire safety information, instruction, and training where appropriate;
- Regularly consult and communicate with our residents and employees on fire safety matters;
- Monitor and review our fire safety systems and prevention measures to ensure their effectiveness.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3.1. This Policy and its delivery is intended to be compatible with the following Council Policies and documents:

- Tenancy Agreement – a contract between a tenant and landlord setting out the legal terms and conditions of the tenancy.
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy – sets out how the Council will provide a repairs service to tenants.

- Corporate Plan – sets out the strategic direction the Council will take in relation to its powers, functions and responsibilities. The Plan includes a strategic ambition to 'strive for full compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards in delivering good quality homes and services to the tenants that live in our homes'.
- Equality and Diversity Document Framework – sets out how the Council will meet the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

3.2. This Policy and its delivery is also intended to be compatible with the following legislation and regulation:

- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Fire Safety Act 2021
- Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022
- Housing Act 2004
- The Building Regulations 2010
- Health Act 2006
- Smoke Free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
- Regulator of Social Housing's Safety and Quality Standard

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. The legislation detailing the requirements of the Council in relation to fire safety within the home is in the Housing Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO). The FSO consolidated several existing fire safety regulations and statutory documents. It came into effect in October 2006 and part of the requirement was that landlords should carry out fire risk assessments to all of their qualifying properties.

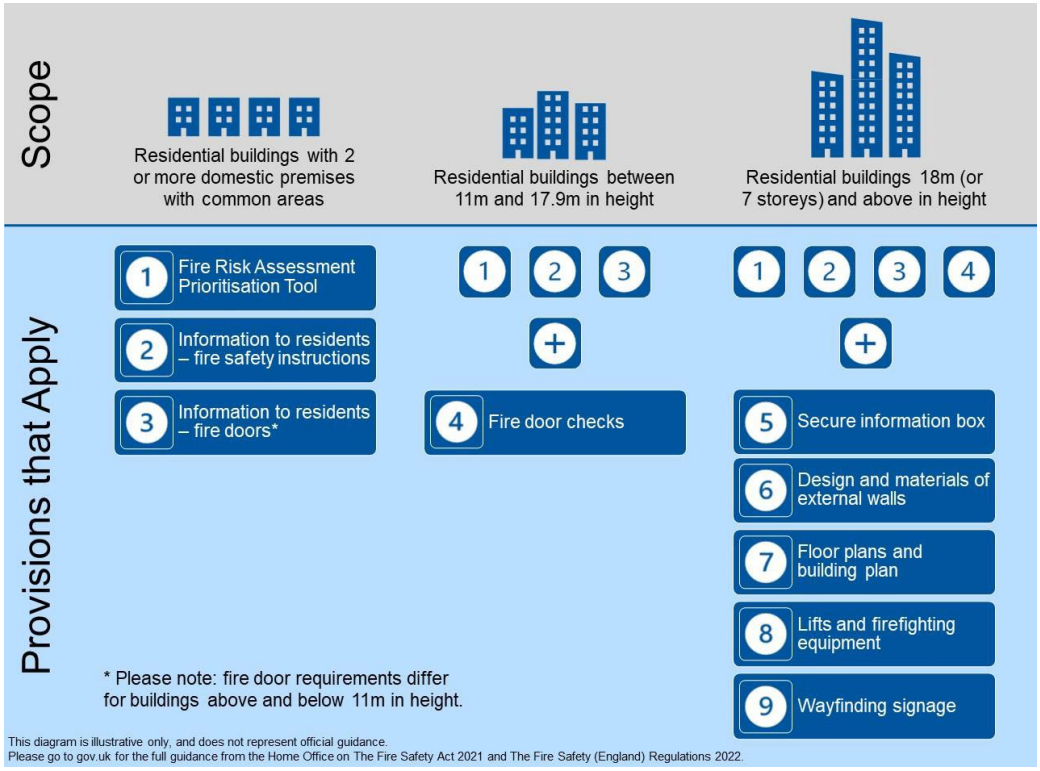
4.2. The Fire Safety Act 2021 and Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 came into effect in May 2022. The act amends the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The Fire Safety (England) Regulations implemented the majority of the recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry in its Phase 1 report that required a change in the law. These regulations seek to improve the safety of blocks of flats in ways which are practical, cost effective for individual leaseholders and proportionate to the risk of fire.

4.3. The Fire Safety Act 2021 clarified that the external walls, flat entrance doors and structure of buildings are all covered by the FSO and must be accounted for in fire risk assessments.

4.4. The Council does not currently own or manage any blocks of flats that exceed 11 metres in height, meaning much of the new regulations fall out of scope.

4.5. The image below summarises the requirements of the new Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022. The Council is required to complete the following for blocks of flats that contain two or more sets of domestic premises, and that contain common parts through which residents would need to evacuate:

1. Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool
2. Information to residents – fire safety instructions
3. Information to residents – fire doors



5. RESPONSIBLE PERSONS

5.1. Fire safety legislation includes the requirement for building owners to have a 'responsible person'. This is the person on whom most of the duties set out in the Fire Safety Order are imposed. In the case of the Council, the responsible person is the Chief Executive.

5.2. Responsibility for delivering the requirements and ensuring the Council's duties are implemented is devolved to the senior management team of the Council, specifically the Assistant Director – Housing and the Housing Maintenance Manager. Officers from the maintenance team, housing estates team, and the housing scheme team are also responsible for delivering the work required.

5.3. The responsible person(s) must take certain steps to ensure the safety of residents. This includes providing information to residents that instruct them what to do in the event of a fire. The instruction must cover the following:

- The evacuation strategy for the building in which each resident lives;
- Instructions on how to report a fire;
- Any other instruction that tells residents what they must do when a fire has occurred.

5.4. The responsible person(s) must also provide relevant information about fire doors, particularly the flat entrance doors of residents, as these play an important part in containing any fire within the flat in which it starts.

5.5. The responsible person(s) must ensure this information is provided to residents as soon as reasonably practicable after they move into their flat and at periods thereafter not exceeding 12 months.

6. FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

6.1. Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the Council as the responsible person (landlord) must carry out fire risk assessments (FRA) and take reasonable steps to remove or reduce any risks that have been identified.

6.2. The Council will ensure that all residential communal blocks owned by the Council have a fire risk assessment (FRA) carried out. Having assessed the risk, the Council have deemed it appropriate to inspect each of our blocks once every 12 months.

6.3. There are four types of FRA surveys:

- **Type 1:** A non-destructive survey covering communal areas. It considers the arrangements for means of escape and includes the examination of a sample of a flat entrance door. It also considers, as far as is reasonably practicable, the separating construction between the flats and the common parts through visual inspection.
- **Type 2:** This fire risk assessment is a destructive inspection of common parts of a building. A type 2 assessment would usually follow deficiencies found in a Type 1 survey.
- **Type 3:** This fire risk assessment involves carrying out a visual inspection, similar to a Type 1 survey, but the assessors go into customers properties.
- **Type 4:** Fire risk assessments are again, carried out within residents properties but also include destructive testing. These levels of survey are rare because the primary legislation, The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, only applies to communal areas in residential buildings.

6.4. Each FRA is reviewed regularly (at least annually), or if there has been a significant change which has affected the fire risk or the fire safety measures. Situations that might prompt a review include the introduction of new equipment, structural alterations to the building, changes to refuse points or if a fire occurs.

LOW RISE BLOCKS		
	Frequency of FRA	Frequency of review
Sheltered Accommodation blocks	Annually or following any significant changes	Renew the FRA annually

LOW RISE BLOCKS		
General Needs blocks	Annually or following and significant changes	Renew the FRA annually

7. FIRE RISKS

7.1. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) places a duty on the Council as a landlord to take general fire precautions to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of the people on the premises and in the immediate vicinity.

The main fire risks identified in communal areas are:

- Arson
- Faulty electrical installations
- Accumulation of flammable rubbish
- Accumulation of stored possessions preventing safe means of escape
- Carpets and mats
- Smoking
- Failures in construction (fire doors, emergency lighting and smoke ventilation)

7.2. The Council will manage its obligations under the FSO as detailed in this Policy.

8. FIRE PRECAUTIONS

8.1. Fire precautions are designed to protect people, property and assets against the loss of life, injury and damage caused by fire.

8.2. The Council will undertake and maintain the following fire precautions with fire prevention measures including:

- Good housekeeping e.g. keeping all means of escapes clear by removal of personal belongings or rubbish from the communal areas, walkways or stairs;
- Adequate security measures (e.g. maintenance of security doors where installed);
- Maintenance, inspection and testing of electrical installations and equipment;
- Prohibition of smoking in communal areas;
- Maintenance, inspection and testing of gas pipework, equipment and installations;
- Control of contractors operations on our premises (i.e. method statement, risk assessment, permit to works, hot working permits).

8.3. The Council also has the following fire protection measures in place:

- Install mains smoke and heat detection equipment;

- Install and maintain fire alarms where necessary;
- Install and service firefighting equipment where necessary e.g. fire blankets;
- Maintain compartmentation and fire doors;
- Maintain fire exits;
- Install and maintain emergency lighting;
- Install and maintain smoke ventilation where necessary;
- Install and service sprinkler system where appropriate.

8.4. The Council will also carry out the following pre-planning measures:

- Carry out fire drills in blocks which have a central alarm system;
- Train, educate and inform residents, staff and contractors;
- Formulate and maintain fire policy and procedures;
- Carry out fire risk assessments and fire audits as necessary;
- Co-operate and co-ordinate with connected premises users;
- Place and maintain clear safety signage and advice.

9. FIRE PREVENTION

9.1. Housekeeping

In order to prevent possible sources of fire and to minimise the risk to residents, the following principles will be applied:

- No dumping of rubbish is permitted in chute areas;
- Rubbish should not be left outside of flat doors and should be disposed of in the designated bin chute or taken to the bin outside;
- No rubbish should be left in communal areas;
- Electrical and service cupboards must not be used for storage of any material;
- Keep clear all corridors, walkway, landings and exit routes (means of escape);
- A zero tolerance approach is taken by the Council in which residents are not permitted to use the common parts of the block to store or dispose of their belongings (no exceptions apply). This is to ensure the common parts are effectively a ‘sterile area’ i.e. free of carpets and mats, combustible material, ignition sources and obstructions.

9.2. Fire Stopping

To maintain the integrity of communal areas and prevent the spread of fire the following principles will be applied:

- Contractors working on any block should take care to avoid penetrating walls, ceilings or floor slabs for passing through cable, pipes or conduits. Where this is unavoidable the contractor will ensure the penetration is sealed and fire stopped adequately and where necessary with intumescent fillers. This must be agreed with the Council before work commences and inspected upon completion.

- Service and electrical cupboards within the communal areas must be kept locked at all times.

9.3. Electricity

In order to ensure the safety of the electrical installation within blocks of flats, the electrical installation to the communal parts of the building will be checked every 5 years in accordance with the guidance provided by the institute of Electrical Engineers Wiring Regulations 18th Edition (as amended). In addition PAT testing is to be carried out to Council supplied electrical equipment.

9.4. Installation of Emergency Lighting

This involves the installation or upgrading of emergency lighting and regular testing where installed in order to maintain a safe escape route.

9.5. Gas Installation

In order to prevent a gas escape or combustible incident with blocks of flats, the building/individual heating systems are annually serviced to ensure compliance with the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998.

9.6. Smoking

To prevent the likelihood of a fire starting, the Council operates a no smoking policy in all communal areas of a building in accordance with the Health Act 2006 and the Smoke Free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006. This does not apply to residents smoking in their own dwelling.

9.7. Regular testing of lightning protection systems will be carried out where installed.

10. FIRE SAFETY EVACUATION POLICY

10.1. The Council have three policies currently in place concerning fire protection:

- Stay Put Policy implemented at Sheltered Accommodation blocks
- Stay Put Policy implemented at General Needs blocks
- Evacuation Policy implemented at General Needs blocks

11. SHELTERED HOUSING – FIRE SAFETY POLICY

11.1. In order to minimise the risk from any fire that may occur within sheltered accommodation blocks and to ensure safe evacuation, the following control measures have been implemented.

11.2. Evacuation Route

To ensure safe evacuation, the route must be kept free from source of ignition, flammable and combustible material and obstructions at all times.

11.3. Person centred risk assessment

The Council will undertake a person centred risk assessment upon sign up for all tenants in sheltered blocks of flats. Where required a personal emergency evacuation procedure will be created. The person centred risk assessment will record any support requirements to highlight those tenants that will require assistance when evacuating. The Council will hold a RAG rated system, which will be held in the fire safety box, enabling immediate access for the fire rescue service. Any tenant using oxygen or with stored oxygen in their flat, will also be flagged.

11.4. Fire Exits

Fire exits will not be left open to ensure that security of the building is not compromised, nor shall fire exits be used by occupants of the building as the main entrance/exit to the building.

11.5. Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are strategically positioned in sheltered accommodation blocks, often in the scheme office and in plant rooms. Where appropriate, extinguishers are not for use by the residents or the public, nor should they be removed from their designated location. All fire extinguishers are maintained and tested annually.

11.6. Signage

Appropriate fire safety signage is displayed throughout the communal areas of the block indicating the fire exit/s and action notice information.

11.7. Communal Areas

All corridors, walkways, landings and exit routes (means of escape) must be kept free from all obstructions, both inside and out, and be available for use when required.

11.8. Fire Doors – Common Areas

Fire doors in communal areas are essential to help prevent the spread of smoke and fire within the communal area of the building. The following applies to all fire doors:

- Fire doors must be kept closed;
- Fire doors must be marked to keep shut;
- They must be checked regularly to ensure they are operating correctly and are not damaged;

- Fire doors including entrance doors to tenants flats and cupboards, should not be propped open, tampered with or compromised in any way;
- Defects or problems with fire doors should be reported immediately to the Council.

11.9. Fire Doors to individual flats

The Council as the flat owner is the duty holder under article 5(3) of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and as the front door to the flat forms part of the common areas of the block, the front door falls within the scope of this legislation.

As the Council is the duty holder for all flats in sheltered housing, the Council has fitted front entrance doors with a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance from both sides of the door (FD30). Providing the integrity of the FD30 door to the flat is maintained and not compromised in any way, this should contain a fire for up to 30 minutes. Where it is necessary for residents to evacuate the building, residents should follow the fire evacuation guidance, and therefore it is essential that the fire is contained within the flat protecting and maintaining the escape route.

11.10. Smoke and Heat Detectors

All sheltered block flats are fitted with a LD1 interlinked fire and smoke alarm system, which are checked annually.

The Councils gas servicing contractor undertake the annual check of the smoke and heat detectors and records the testing as part of the landlords gas service record (LGSR) programme.

Each sheltered block has its own communal fire alarm system, which is linked to the Councils remote monitoring centre, both in and out of normal hours. Smoke detectors fitted within each flat are also connected to the Councils remote monitoring centre.

The communal fire alarm system is tested weekly. Each test will commence from an alternate call point. Tenants will be notified prior to the weekly test, making sure tenants know the difference between a test and an actual alert situation.

Biannually each sheltered block of flats will complete a full fire drill scenario. The co-operation of every resident is expected during this drill. The drill is recorded and on completion, the Housing Scheme Officer will summarise any actions that may have arose because of the drill.

11.11. Mobility Scooters

Where possible, the Council has provided secure fire rated stores for the safe storage of mobility scooters to each sheltered block. The Council does not allow mobility scooters, motorised mobility vehicles, motorised wheelchairs, buggies or other motorised vehicles to be charged or stored in communal areas under

any circumstances. This applies to tenants and their visitors who use such vehicles.

Tenants wishing to store motorised vehicles will only be permitted to do so, if they reside on the ground floor.

11.12. Fire safety advice is provided to all sheltered residents when they commence their tenancy. An individual fire action notice is also fixed to the inside of each flat entrance door, as below.

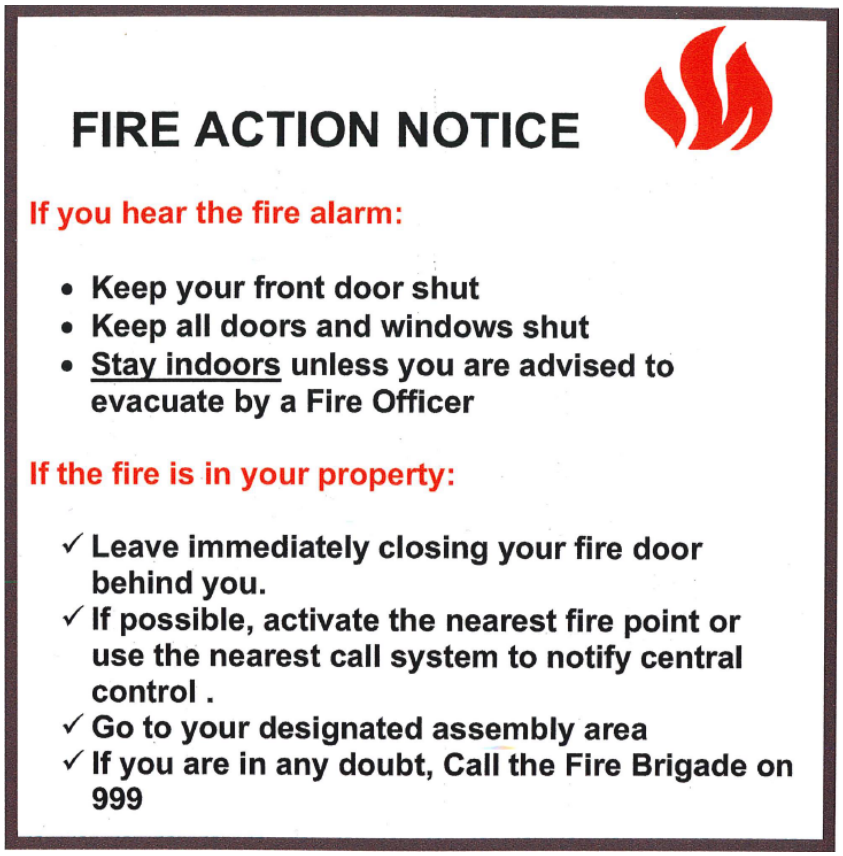
Fire Precaution Advice – Sheltered Schemes

FIRE PRECAUTIONS

This page contains important information.
Please read it carefully and keep it in a safe place for future reference.

• If you live in an enclosed scheme, make sure you know what the fire notices say and where the nearest fire exits are to your home.
• Entrances, exits, corridors and stairways are your escape routes from fire. **Never obstruct these areas with personal items or furniture.**
• The use of oil or paraffin heaters or cookers is extremely dangerous and prohibited by the conditions of your tenancy agreement. **Do not use them.**
• Using **candles** will increase the risk of a fire starting in your home. Make sure that you have a good quality torch available for emergencies instead.
• **Frying pans and chip pans** should only be used with extreme caution. Overfilling chip pans with oil can easily lead to a fire. If your chip pan catches fire, turn off the heat immediately and cover the pan with a Fire Blanket. **Do not try to remove the pan or pour water on it. RAISE THE ALARM** by pressing the button on your pendant or by breaking the glass of the nearest fire alarm point in the corridor. **Leave your home immediately**.
• Always make sure your **cigarettes** are fully extinguished; and **never** smoke in bed.
• **Never** leave your washing to dry near a gas or electric fire.
• **Never** overload extension leads.
• Check your **smoke detectors** regularly to make sure they work. If you do not have one, your Housing Scheme Officer can arrange for one to be installed, usually free of charge.
• Switch off and unplug any electrical appliances when you are not using them (but not your Lifeline, which is designed to be kept plugged in at all times).
• If you use an **electric blanket**, have it serviced regularly and never leave it switched on unattended.
• Close all internal doors when you go to bed. This will help contain any fire and smoke and buy you precious time to escape.
• Remember that smoke rises. If you find yourself in a fire, stay down as low as you can while making your way to the nearest fire exit.
• The Council only insures the fabric of the building, not the contents of your home. Ask your Housing Scheme Officer about the Council's low cost home

Fire Action Notice – fixed to the inside of each sheltered scheme flat entrance door



FIRE ACTION NOTICE

If you hear the fire alarm:

- Keep your front door shut
- Keep all doors and windows shut
- Stay indoors unless you are advised to evacuate by a Fire Officer

If the fire is in your property:

- ✓ Leave immediately closing your fire door behind you.
- ✓ If possible, activate the nearest fire point or use the nearest call system to notify central control .
- ✓ Go to your designated assembly area
- ✓ If you are in any doubt, Call the Fire Brigade on 999

12. GENERAL NEEDS HOUSING – FIRE SAFETY POLICY

12.1. In order to minimise the risk from any fire that may occur within general needs blocks of flats and to ensure safe evacuation, the following control measures have been implemented.

12.2. Fire Exits

Fire exits will not be left open to ensure that security of the building is not compromised.

12.3. Signage

Appropriate fire safety signage is displayed throughout the communal areas of the block indicating the fire exit/s and action notice information.

12.4. Communal Areas

All corridors, walkways, landings and exit routes (means of escape) must be kept free from all obstructions, both inside and out, and be available for use when required.

12.5. Fire Doors – Common Areas

Fire doors in communal areas are essential to help prevent the spread of smoke and fire within the communal area of the building. The following applies to all fire doors:

- Fire doors must be kept closed;
- Fire doors are marked to keep shut;
- They must be checked regularly to ensure they are operating correctly and are not damaged;
- Fire doors including entrance doors to tenants flats and cupboards, should not be propped open, tampered with or compromised in any way;
- Defects or problems with fire doors should be reported immediately to the Council.

12.6. Fire Doors to individual flats

The Council as the flat owner is the duty holder under article 5(3) of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and as the front door to the flat forms part of the common areas of the block, the front door falls within the scope of this legislation. In leasehold properties, where the Council is responsible for the entrance door and frame, the Council has adopted a policy of completing these works at cost to the Council, to ensure that each flat has a fully compliant fire door.

The Council has fitted front entrance doors with a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance from both sides of the door (FD30). Providing the integrity of the FD30 door to the flat is maintained and not compromised in any way this should contain a fire for up to 30 minutes. Where it is necessary for residents to evacuate the building, residents should follow the fire evacuation guidance, and therefore it is essential that the fire is contained within the flat protecting and maintaining the escape route.

When actions that have been identified on the fire risk assessment as the responsibility of a leaseholder, the Council will send the relevant leaseholder a letter advising them that action is required. It is then the responsibility of the leaseholder to complete the action and provide any necessary evidence of compliance.

12.7. All Council owned flats are fitted with hard wired smoke detectors which are checked annually. As a minimum, each property will have a smoke detector covering each level of their living accommodation, however many homes will benefit from a LD2 interlinked alarm system, covering the hall, kitchen, lounge and where applicable the top of the stairs. At the time of writing, the programme of upgrading alarms to the LD2 system is ongoing.

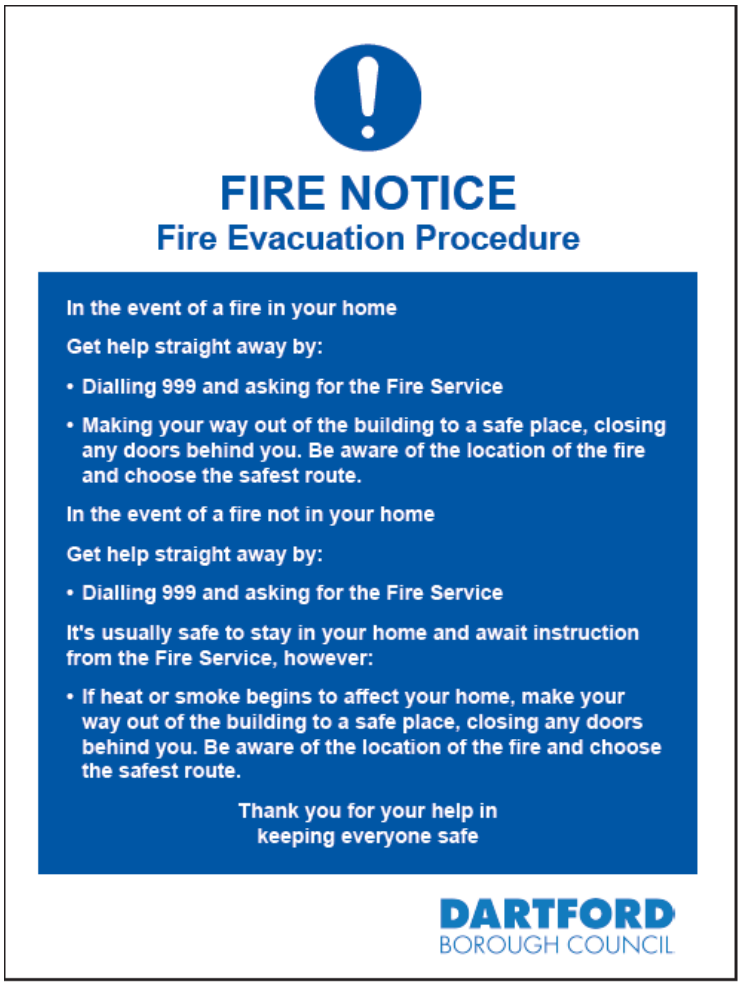
12.8. The Council's gas servicing contractor undertakes the annual check of the smoke and heat detectors and records the testing as part of the landlord's gas service record (LGSR) programme.

12.9. Smoke detectors are not installed in communal areas of general needs blocks where FRA's have determined a low level of risk. (i.e. where no combustible material or ignition source should be found in communal areas).

12.10. The Council maintains a sprinkler system and alarm system to four blocks at Alamein Gardens. The sprinkler and alarm system is serviced and maintained in line with British Standards.

12.11. Fire safety advice, including specific details relating to the fire evacuation procedure is provided to tenants of general needs accommodation on tenancy sign up. Fire action notices are also displayed in the communal entrance area of each block.

Fire Action Notice – displayed in the common entrance area where blocks have a stay put policy



13. PARTNERSHIPS

13.1. The Council will work closely with the Kent Fire and Rescue Services (KFRS). Currently KFRS undertake biennial audits of our sheltered scheme blocks of flats. The purpose of the audit is to identify any immediate risks and to provide an independent check, reviewing if any previous actions have been completed. KFRS will also review our policies and procedures, checking that they are suitable and fit for purpose.

14. COMPLAINTS

14.1. If tenants are not satisfied with the service they have received, the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure can be followed. Complaints leaflets are also available from the Council offices.

14.2. The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted if further advice and support is needed on making a complaint to the Council.

15. DATA PROTECTION

15.1. The UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 regulate the processing of information relating to individuals, which includes the obtaining, holding, using or disclosing of such information.

15.2. The Council needs to collect and use certain types of information about its tenants in order to carry out its everyday business and to fulfil its objectives and its statutory functions.

15.3. The Council's:

- Data Protection Policy sets out how it will protect special category and criminal convictions personal data;
- Housing Services (Landlord and Tenant) Privacy Notice explains that the Council collects personal information to administer its housing (landlord and tenant) services.

16. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

16.1. The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in delivering this Policy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

16.2. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council and that responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.

16.3. This Fire Safety Policy has been subject to a Customer Access Review, to assess the impact it will have on equality. The review found that the Policy will have an overall positive impact as it provides a transparent, proportionate, fair and consistent approach to managing fire safety.

17. MONITORING AND REVIEW

17.1. This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner, in the event of major legislative or operational changes. This Policy may also be reviewed sooner subject to feedback or any changes in practice from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service.