

Mayor consults Londoners on new guidance to improve fire safety

3 years ago



The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan is spearheading vital fire safety improvements in the capital, launching a full public consultation on innovative draft guidance to ensure all new developments are designed with the highest standards of fire safety from the earliest stage, keeping Londoners, their property and the fire service safe.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, in which 72 Londoners tragically lost their lives, Dame Judith Hackitt's Review highlighted the need to transform the fire and building safety regime. Dame Judith recommended that 'some minimum requirements around fire safety will need to be addressed when local planning authorities are determining planning applications and will require input from those with the relevant expertise'.

The Mayor has a strategic planning role for the city and his 'London Plan' sets out guidance for development and building across the city.

The Mayor has repeatedly said that the fire safety requirements in existing national Building Regulations are not fit for purpose and the progress of reform is too slow. With this draft Fire Safety London Plan guidance, Sadiq is leading the way in London to ensure fire safety is embedded in the early stages of all planning processes.

This guidance sets out how developers should demonstrate compliance with the Mayor's detailed London Plan policies to achieve the highest standards in fire safety and 'safe and dignified' evacuations. This is in addition to the Government's fire safety considerations that apply only to a limited number of buildings at the planning application stage.

The draft guidance also highlights that it is the responsibility of developers to demonstrate that their developments can be constructed and occupied safely with regards to the highest standards of fire safety, in a way that won't impact neighbouring buildings. To ensure this, the design of the development needs to consider fire safety and the safe and dignified evacuation for all from the outset – for example, where a fire engine will park in the event of fire, whether there is a safe and accessible evacuation route for occupants, whether the external walls are made of non-combustible materials and what fire safety measures will be incorporated into the buildings.

The guidance seeks to:

Ensure that competent fire safety experts are involved at the earliest stage of the design process.

Ensure that evacuation lifts and the space and measures required for them to operate as such are included in developments, so that people can evacuate a building with dignity during an emergency.

Ensure that fire safety and evacuation measures are identified at the planning application stage and can be referred to in each subsequent stage of the development process.

The early consideration of fire safety in the design process helps ensure the right measures are in place to limit the spread of fire and ensures that the best evacuation strategy can be implemented if required in the event of an emergency.

This guidance is just one part of the wider work that the Mayor is undertaking to protect and support Londoners on fire safety. For example, providers of his Affordable Homes Programme must deliver high standards in fire safety and he is lobbying on behalf of flat leaseholders to stop them bearing the unfair costs of remediating their building.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "The current building safety situation is a scandal and I am concerned that almost five years after the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, it appears that the Government are still not willing to properly address it.

"That's why I've been using all the tools at my disposal to raise the standard of fire safety measures in London, through requirements for developers in my London Plan and lobbying developers and building owners to share vital fire safety information with residents. This draft guidance goes even further, and will ensure fire safety is embedded in the earliest stage of the design process. Ministers must do their part and urgently review and improve Building Regulations, including regulations relating to single escape staircases in very tall buildings.

"I am committed to ensuring all Londoners feel safe in their homes, and that in the event of an emergency, they can evacuate safely and with dignity."

London Fire Brigade's Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Fire Safety, Greg Ashman, said: "We support the Mayor's fire safety guidance within the London Plan.

"It is imperative developers are considering fire safety at the earliest stage of the building design process and we agree that the safety of all members of the public as well as our firefighters should be considered at this stage.

“We still need to see a culture change when it comes to fire safety in all buildings and we believe this guidance will influence the overall safety of London’s buildings in the future.

“We will be looking through this guidance in detail and responding to the public consultation in full.”

The draft Fire Safety London Plan Guidance will be up for consultation from 11 February 2022 until 20 June 2022.

Image credit: Shutterstock