

BSA welcome updates to new care home safety but calls for further action

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The [Business Sprinkler Alliance](#) (BSA) has welcomed the [recent announcements in England](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) regarding updates to Building Regulations Approved Document B and Technical Booklet E, which now guides the installation of sprinkler systems in new care homes. While this change is a positive step, it does not go far enough in protecting all vulnerable individuals in existing care homes and also other types of specialised housing.

In the statement from England, the then Building Safety Minister Rushanara Ali MP emphasised that “a compassionate society protects its most vulnerable.” Her views come in the wake of the comment made by Grenfell Inquiry chair Sir Martin Moore-Bick who said the definition of a ‘higher risk’ building should be reviewed and not be based on its height rather than the presence of vulnerable people¹. The BSA agrees with this sentiment but contends that the revision to the guidance to include new care homes falls short of fully embracing this principle.

Tom Roche, Secretary of the Business Sprinkler Alliance, stated, “While we welcome the inclusion of sprinklers in new care homes, we must recognise that this regulatory change leaves a significant gap in protection for other vulnerable individuals. The new changes do not apply to existing care homes, nor do they cover assisted living accommodations or other buildings housing vulnerable people.”

The devastating fire at [Beechmere Retirement Village](#) in Crewe in 2019 was a startling example of the risks faced by vulnerable residents in buildings not classified as care homes. “Beechmere was an extra care living accommodation, not technically a care home, yet it housed elderly individuals, many of whom required assistance. The unsprinklered, timber-framed building was completely destroyed by fire, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive fire safety measures in all types of accommodation for

vulnerable people,” explained Tom Roche.

The BSA emphasises that the current situation creates an inconsistency where people with similar risk characteristics to those in care homes receive differing levels of fire safety provisions. This discrepancy is particularly concerning given the growing popularity of assisted living and retirement village concepts.

“We’ve observed that following serious incidents like the Beechmere fire, operators often take retroactive measures, such as retrofitting sprinklers in similar extra care facilities,” Roche noted. “However, we believe it’s crucial to implement these life-saving systems proactively, rather than reactively.”

The BSA is supporting calls on the government to expand the scope of the new revised guidance and to go further to include all forms of accommodation housing vulnerable individuals, including assisted living facilities, retirement villages, and specialised housing. The risk of fire is not confined to certain height thresholds or because we use different terms for similar premises. It argues that this expansion would truly embody the compassionate society that former Minister Ali envisions.

“Sprinkler systems not only control or extinguish fires quickly, minimising damage and fire spread, but they also provide crucial additional time for residents to evacuate or be helped to evacuate, which is especially important for those with mobility issues,” Tom Roche added. “Furthermore, these systems offer peace of mind to residents, staff, and families, knowing that extra safety measures are in place.”

As the construction industry and care sector continue to evolve, the BSA urges policymakers to close this protective gap, ensuring that all vulnerable individuals, regardless of their specific living arrangement, benefit from the highest standards of fire safety.

The BSA believes that sprinkler systems should be considered more readily as a viable option right across the built environment whether it is a hospital, school, retail or leisure facility, or commercial and industrial building.

For more information about the BSA visit the www.business-sprinkler-alliance.org