



Fire Safety in Specialised Housing - Extra Care Housing

Across the UK, clients, designers and contractors historically faced divergent and regional interpretations of the fire regulations by Fire Officers and Building Controls in respect of their application to Higher Risk Accommodation for older persons such as Extra Care Housing or Assisted Living.

This briefing note updates fire safety design and operational guidance and recommendations associated with Extra Care Housing (or their many variations) as included within the recently revised *Code of Practice BS9991:2015 Fire Safety in the Design, Management and Use of Residential Buildings* and, in particular, introduces the housing typology 'Specialised Housing'.

It states: *"Specialised Housing contains a diverse range of accommodation where the residents are likely to be less mobile, have other impairments or are otherwise vulnerable to emergency situations"*

Furthermore, the adoption of a 'person-centred' approach means that: *"designers need to consider the characteristics of the residents of the building and incorporate an appropriate range of fire precautionary measures to secure a suitable level of fire safety within the building"*.

This means that, due to the increasing numbers of larger specialised housing developments coupled with an ageing population, long term 'future-proofing' must be considered from the outset at design feasibility stage, allowing for long term easy adaptation and tailoring of enhanced fire safety measures appropriate to the age profile and disability levels of specialised housing developments.

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March 2016

Introduction

Across the UK, clients, designers and contractors historically faced divergent and regional interpretations of the fire regulations by Fire Officers and Building Controls in respect of their application to Higher Risk Accommodation for older persons such as Extra Care Housing or Assisted Living. Indeed, in many cases there appeared to be a basic misunderstanding of what Extra Care Housing is and how Extra Care Housing needs to evolve during the building's lifetime in order to accommodate increasing levels of physical or sensory disability or cognitive impairment such as dementia.

For the purpose of this briefing, the term 'specialised housing' covers the terminologies: Extra Care Housing; Sheltered Housing; Assisted Living; Housing with Care; Independent Living with Care and any building where the dwellings are grouped into multi-residential accommodation with management in place to provide support and care (where required) to deal with developing disability or frailty of the residents. (Please note that Residential Care Homes fall outside the scope of BS9991:2015).

What does BS9991:2015 set out?

BS9991:2015 introduces amongst other things the change from "sheltered or extra care housing" to "specialised housing" with an expansion of related recommendations. The document also includes new guidance on the management of additional needs and disabilities being based upon "A Person Centred Approach".

During the rewriting of the Code of Practice, the working group under the direction of the Chief Fire Officer's Association aimed to *"actively seek to share information ... develop and promote best practice, to ensure that persons at high risk from fire are provided with adequate standards of protection, prevention, monitoring and management, whilst still maintaining their independence and quality of life"*.

The aim is to *"reduce the incidence of death or injury from fire to vulnerable persons living in domestic dwellings and higher risk residential accommodation"*.

BS9991:2015 assists developers by introducing the principle of "Housing Typology" related to the various models of specialised housing ranging from basic Sheltered / Retirement Housing through to Retirement Villages encompassing a range of housing types and care levels provided on one site.

It is recognised that 'specialised housing' covers a diverse range of accommodation where residents across the age spectrum have varying levels of immobility or have physical or cognitive impairments demanding a tailored approach to fire safety design and management.

The principle of 'future-proofing' is also recognised, with fire precautionary measures being 'designed in' allowing for building adaptation due to the changing needs of residents over time. For instance, the adoption of automatic water fire suppression systems (either sprinklers or misting systems) in low rise buildings raising the standard of fire safety and potentially allowing flexibility in spatial planning to accommodate developing frailty of occupants.

Recognition is also given to the additional requirements associated with tall and very tall buildings, where additional measures related to structural and fire integrity and enhanced firefighting requirements need to be addressed. This is particularly important where high rise inner city residential or office blocks may be converted to 'specialised housing'.

The importance of an ongoing review of management of fire safety is recognised and with the need for adjustment when regularly reviewing the age and frailty profile of the occupants. Fire Risk Assessments and Evacuation Procedural amendments related to the likely reaction of the occupants with known disabilities or cognitive impairments is highlighted.

Assisted evacuation should be dealt with on an individual 'as-needs' assessment basis as part of the regular review of Fire Risk Assessment and Personal Evacuation Plans. Assisted evacuation is particularly important when dealing with residents suffering from dementia where irrational behavior can be the main threat to survival in a fire situation.

Means of Escape from 'specialised housing' is covered in detail covering horizontal and vertical evacuation routes, whilst recognising how to deal with furnished recesses off corridors, provision of dedicated electric scooter stores, galleried landings, open plan flat designs and atria. All of these features are, and will increasingly be designed into the larger forms of specialised housing developments. For example:

- Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (sprinklers to BS9251:2014 or water mist systems to DD8458-1) are covered in detail throughout the document related to their applicability.
- Glazing systems and active fire curtain and barriers are covered by BS9991:2015, these being increasingly required where 'open-plan' communal areas and / or galleries are designed in the larger developments.
- Communal roof gardens, terraces and balconies are covered with particular reference to specialised housing in consideration of access and egress.

A strong emphasis is also placed upon the management of additional needs and disabilities in specialised housing where an ageing population is placing an increasing need for building staff to effectively recognise the changes that will be required during the lifetime of the building.

And finally...

The benefits across the UK when consulting BS9991:2015 will be a more consistent approach to the Design, Specification, Construction and Management of Higher Risk Specialised Housing (and its variants) through tailored Fire Risk Assessments and Prevention measures in future together with enhanced fire protection and suppression measures commensurate with higher risk accommodation which is likely to be introduced at the next revision to the Building Regulations.

The Housing LIN Technical Brief No.5, *Fire Safety in Extra Care Housing in the UK*, issued in 2010, will be re-published in the light of BS9991:2015 as *Fire Safety in Specialised Housing*. The new document will also cover recent work carried out by the CFOA working group in looking at Fire Risk Factors in Specialised Housing with respect to Control Measures and Management Actions needed in order to mitigate risks.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About Faithful+Gould



Faithful+Gould is an integrated project and programme management consultancy. It supports clients with managements of their construction projects and programmes. It is also the lead on asset management, surveying and design work on the SCAPE framework.

www.fgould.com

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing LIN is called upon by a wide range of statutory and other organisations to provide expert advice and support regarding the implementation of policy and good practice in the field of housing, care and support services.

To access further resources on fire safety and fire protection in extra care housing, visit:

www.housinglin.org.uk/pagefinder.cfm?cid=8012

Published by

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