

Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategy

2024 - 2026

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1.0	Amanda Gale	02/01/2024	New document created	Andy Hawksworth

About this document

We strive to provide quality, affordable homes in happy, successful places. We're driven by our social purpose, with residents at the heart of everything we do.

This document shows how and when we will communicate and engage on building safety with anyone over the age of 16 living in flats within 'High-Risk Buildings' (HRBs) – and with owners of flats in these buildings.

This is one of the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022, which defines HRBs as buildings which are at least 18m in height or have at least seven storeys and contain at least two residential units.

All our HRBs also have localised resident engagement strategies.

This strategy supports our Corporate Plan 2023-2026 and wider approach to engaging with customers:

Inform We will ensure our customers are kept updated and well informed.	Consult We will consult with our customers and act on our customer voice.	Involve We will involve our customers at key stages to ensure transparency of any decisions made about safety aspects.	Collaborate We will work with our customers in a collaborative way to look at opportunities for improvement.	Empower We will empower our customers to play a key role in keeping themselves and others safe.
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It gives us a framework for meeting the Building Safety Act 2022 but is a live document which we'll update around any changes in legislative requirements or other changes we make.

This strategy is also about making it easier for our customers to speak to the right team at the right time and to get the right resolution. It also includes how we work with interested parties (such as the Fire & Rescue Services and management companies).

Some of our residents live in HRBs where we aren't the Principle Accountable Person or Accountable Person under the Act: we may not be the freeholder or have the Head Lease responsibility. In these cases, we'll try to provide the same information to our customers, but this will rely on the Accountable Person sharing information.

While this strategy focuses mainly on our high-risk residential buildings (existing ones and those under development), some of the principles can also be applied to other homes as well.

Everyone safe and well

Our overall intention is to provide good quality homes to our residents, where they feel safe. Our focus is to build trust with residents and show how we value their views, so that we can engage with them in a meaningful way about building safety.

Ultimately our ambition is guided by our health and safety vision of 'everyone safe and well, everywhere, everyday'. This drives two priorities:

- to understand, maintain, invest and manage the safety of our new and existing homes.
- to listen, communicate and engage with our residents and communities, enabling them to be safe and feel safe in their homes.

These are our key commitments in this Strategy.

- We will inform and consult residents using effective communication methods and a range of channels, reflecting and showing empathy for different customer needs and demographics.
- We will provide a consistent approach to customer engagement across our localities, using a range of communication channels.
- We will make sure customers have accessible and clear ways to raise any concerns about building safety.
- We will make sure customers are fully aware of our responsibilities, and theirs, to keep them and their homes safe.
- We will have a bespoke approach for our high-risk sites and the potential issues there.
- We will promote a positive environment for open and honest engagement.
- We will constantly review and seek to improve how we engage with customers about building safety.

We want to become a sector leader in health and safety and recognise that there's more work to do to achieve this. This is what that means in terms of how we all need to work together and how we'll assess our progress when it comes to building safety.

- We have internal standards to make sure our buildings always meet the safety requirements of current and future expected laws and regulations.
- We identify and develop new technologies and digital platforms to record and share information.
- We actively share good practice with relevant bodies and forums, and seek to positively influence building safety decisions that impact the sector.
- We will engage with all our residents, listening to their concerns, communicating our commitments, and theirs; responding to them and demonstrating that they are living in safe homes.
- We help our residents to understand the importance of a positive health and safety culture within their home.

Responsible Persons for Building Safety

Part 4 of the Building Safety Act 2022 identifies new duty holders – known as ‘Accountable Persons’ (AP) – for residential HRBs. This is the organisation or person who owns or has responsibility for the building. It may also be responsible for maintaining the common parts of a building like corridors or lobbies.

The AP will have a duty to take all reasonable steps to prevent a building safety risk happening (defined as ‘spread of fire and/or structural failure’) and to reduce the seriousness of an incident if one happens.

If a building has more than one AP, the ‘Principal Accountable Person’ (PAP) is the one responsible for the structure and exterior of the building. When buildings have a single AP, that entity or person is the PAP.

PAPs must also have registered existing buildings with the Building Safety Regulator by October 2023 and register all new buildings before occupation.

This strategy outlines our legal obligations which are to:

- prepare a resident engagement strategy
- act in accordance with the strategy
- review and revise the strategy and keep a record of the reviews
- provide the latest version to each Accountable Person (where this applies)
- when necessary, consult residents, owners of residential units and Accountable Persons about the strategy and take their opinions into account.

Our approach to building safety

We integrate the skills, knowledge and experience of our teams, our residents and our industry partners to make sure that the existing and new homes that our residents live in are safe.

We bring together the combined knowledge, experience and passion of multiple disciplines across the organisation. We work as one team with resident safety at the heart of our decision-making.

To strengthen and sustain that, we work in partnership with our residents: listening, engaging, and partnering with them on the safety standards in their homes and communities.

We use co-creation wherever possible, to make sure that the voice of the customer shapes the decisions that are made.

We’re also launching a new digital engagement platform ‘Engage’ where we will add bespoke opportunities for digital engagement on building safety.

We work closely with other housing associations, industry organisations and networks to develop, share and apply best practice.

Our approach leverages the latest developments in technology and data management to enable delivery of every aspect of our strategy: from design and build to compliance and communication.

Building Safety Managers

While there's no legal requirement to have Building Safety Managers for HRBs as long as all legal duties are met, we're responding proactively and positively for our residents so have decided to maintain these roles.

A Building Safety Manager is allocated to each HRB and each Building Safety Manager is accountable for several HRBs. This helps to make sure we're maintaining the safety of our HRBs and meeting regulatory and legislative requirements like the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act.

Building Safety Managers are in place to understand the systems within the buildings as well as to have an overall understanding of fire and building safety. Some of their main responsibilities are engaging with customers; ensuring we comply with relevant regulations and legislation; maintaining a 'golden thread' of digital information about the building and safety; overseeing safety checks and works; and coordinating with stakeholders like the Health & Safety Executive, Building Control and the Fire Service.

The Building Safety Managers are supported by the wider Building Safety and Compliance Team who also hold specific information relating to the systems which make up our buildings.

Trades operatives can also play a key role in establishing positive and meaningful engagement with our residents.

Golden thread of information - our commitment to sharing information

We are committed to sharing relevant information with our customers and making as much information as possible readily available. We are working with our developers and external contractors to make sure we hold as much accurate and relevant information about our HRBs as possible.

As we make information more accessible and understandable, we will build trust with our customers and create a virtuous cycle that will lead to better safety. We want to establish a strong culture of customer safety that will be reflected in decision making throughout the organisation, and we will ensure we are accountable to our residents for our performance.

We are also working to make sure that we provide information to customers in formats that are easy to understand and review. Our Building Safety and Compliance team are also on hand if customers have any queries or areas for discussion.

The localised strategies are live documents and we welcome relevant updates from customers about their situation, so we have up to date requirements and information.

We currently provide the following information and channels:

- fire evacuation strategies for all blocks, held on Fire Action Notices in each building
- a 24-hour emergency phone line, should an emergency occur where our customers need support
- contact details for the relevant Building Safety Manager overseeing each HRB, held in the communal area of the building
- fire safety information held on our website
- fire safety week type awareness campaigns on social media.

Customers can request any other safety information they believe they require. We will assess the request and either provide this or discuss the requirements with them.

If requested information is not readily available, we will provide it within seven working days. We will only provide documentation that has been fully qualified (not any which is in a draft format).

How we will communicate and engage with residents

We want to create an open and positive environment that will let residents engage honestly, building trust and enabling us to understand our residents' perspectives. Customers from individual blocks or schemes should be able to raise concerns and discuss issues about their building and its management.

We want to engage well with our customers by being flexible and tailoring our engagement for them, so they respond proactively to fire and building safety messages.

We recognise we need to use various communication and engagement methods to meet different needs and preferences. We will reinforce any critical messages through various channels. Here are some examples.

- Customer Engagement Platform (launching 2024) - we will create online private areas for each HRB to help communicate about safety matters. Customers can also raise concerns and we can identify solutions to either remove a concern or reassure them about measures in place to keep them safe. Content could expand over time to include walkabouts and wider locality/place-based issues. This work will be owned by the Building Safety Managers
- Sovereign's website, providing advice for both tenants and leaseholders
- Customer portal (My Sovereign)
- Social media channels
- On-site communal TV screens (where present)
- QR codes
- Notice boards (where present)
- Phone and SMS
- Letters
- Emails
- Customer engagement sessions, coffee mornings and face to face Building Safety Manager discussions.

Where required, we will also share the information from localised Building Safety Resident Engagement Strategies with those who support residents (such as next of kin and support workers) when our customers ask us to.

The Building Safety and Compliance team will conduct regular surveys (using various channels) to see how we can engage better with customers and where there are potential opportunities to extend our collaborative working further.

There are likely to be specific requirements in legislation but here are the engagement and feedback tactics/channels we propose using.

- Customer engagement events
- Resident Board Partnership meetings
- Scrutiny Coordination Group projects
- Youth Panel feedback
- Taller building customer panels – TBC (with access to a building consultant)
- Surveys, including STAR customer satisfaction surveys
- Whistleblowing
- On-site feedback from Housing for Older People/Supported Housing teams
- Customer Engagement Platform (launching 2024).

Complaints process

We will identify building safety complaints within our existing complaints policy and process. This is available on our website or we can send a copy of this on request.

We will try our best to address complaints and resolve any disputes. If customers remain unhappy, we will refer them to the Building Safety Regulator.

Responsibilities for safety

We are committed to providing safe homes for our customers and regularly carry out compliance checks in our homes and high-risk buildings. Our customers play an important role in keeping everyone safe and we encourage them to contact us with any safety concerns.

For new residents, we cover the fire strategy for their HRB when they take out their tenancy or leasehold agreement with us.

Fire strategy definitions can be found within our Fire Strategy, which is available upon request. Our Localised Resident Engagement Strategies contain the specific Fire Strategy information for that building.

There's lots of useful fire safety information on our website, including specific content for tenants and for leaseholders and shared owners:

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/advice-and-guides/safety>

We also work in partnership with our Primary Authority (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service) and include their link on our website to advise customers in HRBs what to do in the event of a fire: <https://www.hantsfire.gov.uk/safety/home-safe-home/what-type-of-property-do-you-live-in/high-rise-living/>

We will:

- provide information about fire safety procedures
- explain the roles and legal obligations of residents and owners of flats in maintaining building safety
- give adequate notice of any safety inspections, testing and servicing. We'll also work with customers to amend appointments for times that are suitable for both parties
- consult affected customers of any major works affecting fire safety of the block and any cost (where this applies)
- inform customers where urgent action was taken to mitigate immediate risk
- recognise that customers may opt out of consultation, and this is accepted
- record and adopt person-centred communication as required (such as providing information in large font, translation into another language and so on)
- record and store feedback securely in line GDPR data protection regulations
- consult on the first issue of the localised Resident Engagement Strategy and any changes after that
- consider resident feedback in relation to Building Safety and update our processes and procedures where we are in agreement
- update and re-distribute the localised Resident Engagement Strategy as required to all residents (and to owners of flats or Accountable Persons where relevant).

Customers also have certain responsibilities in maintaining building safety.

- Not to act in a way that creates a significant risk of a building safety risk materialising, or interfere with any relevant safety items.
- Comply with reasonable requests, such as to allow access to their home so that we or contractors can undertake routine safety inspections and maintenance.
- We have processes in place to make sure we complete safety checks within the time periods that apply to them. If difficulties occur in getting access, we will work with our customers but, if problems continue, we will take legal action to ensure everyone's safety.
- Customers have a responsibility for building safety and compliance within their homes, to minimise risks to them and their neighbours as far as reasonably possible.
- Responsibilities about fire doors vary and depend on lease agreements.
- We may request copies of compliance documents to make sure customers are as safe as possible in properties where we are not responsible for compliance testing and servicing (including management company-led buildings).
- Customers need to notify us as soon as possible if they have a hidden or visible disability need and are unable to evacuate their home in the event of a fire, so that we can carry out a 'Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan' (PEEP). This applies to our tenants and to leaseholders.
- Customers should not undertake any building works without prior permission which require the opening up of walls, floors, or ceilings, as this may promote the spread of fire.

Fire safety in communal areas

We take fire safety extremely seriously. The consequences of fires in flats, as we've seen in media reporting in recent years, can be both tragic and devastating.

For the safety of all customers, we operate a strict zero tolerance approach to ensure clear corridors. This is also a requirement in our customers' Tenancy Agreements and Leasehold Agreements.

All communal areas including balconies, corridors, landings, lobbies outside front doors, communal cupboards, and all areas under stairs (including inside all electrical cupboards), must always be kept clear of all items.

This is because these create a risk by preventing a safe exit route in the event of a fire, or from the item itself catching fire. They can also delay access for emergency services in trying to reach our customers to provide help and rescue.

Items we mean by this include (but are not limited to):

- e-bikes, e-scooters, skateboards, mobility scooters, wheelchairs, pushchairs, prams and buggies, toys
- white goods (such as fridges, washing machines) and furniture
- decorations (such as pictures, plants, and plant stands)
- rubbish, bags, cardboard or unwanted household goods even if they're awaiting collection
- clothes, drying equipment

Any items will be removed, and we will work with customers to find a solution if there are storage issues in a building.

Reviews and decision making

We will provide the latest version of the Resident Engagement Strategy to residents and owners of residential units. We will also review it and log changes:

- at least every two years
- after every consultation on the strategy
- after a mandatory occurrence report
- after the completion of significant material alterations to the building.

We will consult affected customers about any major works affecting fire safety of the block, any cost (where this applies) and who will carry out the work.

We will give a reasonable period to gather feedback from residents about this – if possible, we will give 21 days for feedback but, where a matter needs urgent action, we may need to notify customers after this has taken place.

When we have received residents' views, we will consider these and feed them into our decision making. This will be done by a senior member of the Building Safety and Compliance team.

We will keep a record of key building safety decisions and feed these back to residents.

How we will measure success

Our success will be partly measured by creating opportunities for residents to get involved and influence how we do what we do:

- Continued involvement and feedback through our Resident & Board Partnership
- Scrutiny Co-ordination Group - potential service improvement project
- Set up of a bespoke communication channel on our Customer Engagement Portal during 2024.

We can also measure our progress through the following Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and by running bespoke surveys at least annually:

- Residents feel they are listened to and can influence decisions, and we act upon them (TSM 06)
- Residents have increased trust in Sovereign (Level 1 measurement)
- Customers feels safe in their homes (TSM TP-05)