

How to engage with residents



Principles for engaging with residents

The Building Safety Act (BSA) has been introduced to ensure that residents are safe and feel safe in their homes.

This document sets out key considerations to help Principal Accountable Persons (PAPs) and Accountable Person (APs) engage effectively with residents.

It is based on research with a wide cross-section of residents.

1. Understand who lives in each building

What we know

Not all residents are the same. Understanding who lives in a high-rise building is the first step to putting residents at the heart of building safety.

What to do

Find out who residents are so that you can communicate effectively with them and design safety systems that respond to their needs.

2. Engage via multiple channels

What we know

Residents access information in different ways. A 'one-size fits all' approach to engaging with residents about important safety matters will not work for everyone.

What to do

Engage with residents using a variety of channels.

3. Communicate information effectively

What we know

Fire and building safety is important for residents but it is often not a top-of-mind concern, and it can be confusing to understand.

What to do

Use accessible communication approaches and mixed formats to help residents understand and familiarise themselves with the systems that make them safer.

4. Listen to residents

What we know

Residents feel safer when they can reach out to their building owners/managers simply and straightforwardly whenever they need to.

What to do

Make it easy for residents to request information, respond to a consultation, raise concerns and escalate complaints.

5. Be inclusive of everyone

Non-English speaking residents >

Disabled residents >

What we know

Many residents, including non-English speakers and disabled residents or those with long term health conditions, face additional barriers that limit them from engaging with building safety.

What to do

Understand what additional barriers some residents face, and how to remove them, so that all residents feel and are safer.

Understand who lives in each building

Not all residents are the same. Understanding who lives in a high-rise building is the first step to putting residents at the heart of building safety. Find out who residents are so that you can communicate effectively with them and design safety systems that respond to their needs.

When is this relevant?

For providing building and fire safety information

For ensuring effective evacuation plans and escape routes are in place for the right residents

For developing a successful Resident Engagement Strategy



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Key principles

1

Develop a system to profile residents

Residents are diverse, with a range of different needs

Create a clear system that collects, stores and maintains key information about residents. Consider:

- Gathering as much information as possible when residents move in
- Doing an annual residents' survey
- Who else can help you to engage with, and understand, residents e.g. outreach teams, onsite staff like concierges or caretakers, maintenance staff who have contact with residents
- Embedding the system across your organisation and communicating to staff their role in building understanding of residents

2

Understand the different tenancy types in your building

Different tenancy types come with different hurdles for engagement

Getting up to date resident contact information for leasehold properties or short-term leases can be challenging. Consider what opportunities you have to engage with these residents, and use these to collect up to date contact information. Do you have a concierge they might make contact with? Might they contact you to pay certain fees, or request access to shared building facilities? All of these are valuable opportunities to collect up to date contact information

3

Consider what information to collect

Communications and safety systems can be more effective if you ask key questions about residents' requirements

Ask residents questions such as:

'Do you own or rent your home? Who from?'

'How do you want to be communicated with?'

'Can you understand English well?'

'Do you or anyone you live with have additional needs?'

'What support might you need in an emergency?'

4

Use multi-channel approaches

Residents rely on different channels of communication

Use a combination of channels that engages with all residents and recognises that not everyone is digitally savvy. (Some people may want to tell you about their requirements in writing, in-person or over the phone)

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Key principles

5

Check evacuation needs

Many people with support requirements do not identify as being disabled

Use inclusive questions when asking residents about their requirements:

'Do you need support with walking down the stairs?'

'Do you struggle to follow instructions?'

'Are crowded spaces difficult for you?'

'Can you hear alarms?'

6

Be transparent

Residents want to know that their information is secure

Only collect and store the information you need and be clear with residents about how their information will be stored, managed and used (in line with GDPR)

7

Keep information updated

Inaccurate information will not help your organisation to keep residents safe

Make sure residents know how they can notify you of changes in their circumstances and regularly check residents' information is up-to-date

Considerations



Ask yourself how well you know the people who live in your building.

Do you feel your information is sufficient and representative? If not, how might you go about reaching more residents?

2

Engage via multiple channels

Residents access information in different ways. A 'one-size fits all' approach to engaging with residents about important safety matters will not work for everyone. Engage with residents using a variety of channels.

When is this relevant?

For providing building and safety information, and details about decisions relating to the management of the building

For communicating with residents about their new rights and responsibilities, and any complaints processes

For ensuring the appropriate evacuation plans and escape routes are familiar to the right residents



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Key principles

1

Use multiple communications channels

Residents have different communications requirements and preferences

Do not rely on one channel to communicate information. Consider:

Print

- Letters
- Newsletters
- In-building notices



Verbal

- Phone
- Caretaker/concierge
- Housing officer
- Zoom



Online

- Email
- Text
- Portal / online
- App



2

Communicate regularly

Residents feel better informed when they receive frequent communications, particularly from their building management

Communicate regularly with residents and keep information up-to-date

3

Don't forget face-to-face discussions

Talking through safety (processes and plans) with residents can help them to feel safer

Bring residents together to discuss building safety in informal and enjoyable ways, and offer opportunities for them to ask questions

4

Utilise demonstrations and drills

Residents want to understand the fire alarm and escape routes specific to their building

Arrange regular fire alarm tests and evacuation drills for residents to practise how they should respond in an emergency



2

Engage via multiple channels

Considerations



Could your organisation employ a caretaker or concierge?

Research shows that responsive on-site staff increase feelings of safety and offer an important human connection regarding building and safety issues



Why not host a coffee morning, estate walkabout or safety workshop?

Discussing building and fire safety with residents can take different formats, not just traditional meetings



Consider working with local Fire and Rescue Services and community and faith groups.

Local partners may be able to help with engagement with residents and increase their interest in building safety



Try setting up a block WhatsApp group for residents as an additional channel for communicating building information.

Messaging platforms can bring residents together and support them to feel more informed

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3

Communicate information effectively

Fire and building safety is important for residents but it is often not a top-of-mind concern, and it can be confusing to understand. Use accessible communication approaches and mixed formats to help residents understand and familiarise themselves with the systems that make them safer.

When is this relevant?

For all communications to residents



Key principles

1

Adopt accessible communication approaches

Residents understand building safety information better when simple communications principles are followed

- Take things back to basics and assume no prior knowledge of building safety (e.g. be explicit about not using lifts to evacuate)
- Ensure information is easy to read, concise and clear
- Make information direct and unambiguous (e.g. state what the 'stay put' policy actually means)
- Keep language simple, non-technical and jargon-free
- Create content that is inclusive and assumes low literacy levels for all residents
- Make the design as legible as possible, for example using a minimum 14 point text size for printed material

2

Use mixed formats

Residents often find information is easier to digest and comprehend when given verbally and visually

Make sure the information you relay is not too text heavy and is balanced with a mix of engaging formats such as visuals and videos when possible

3

Make resident actions and responsibilities clear

Residents are not always sure about what to do in an emergency and where their responsibilities lie (e.g. smoke alarms within their flats)

Consider how instructional videos, step-by-step guides, colour-coded text, and dos and don'ts lists can help residents to understand their role in keeping everyone safe

4

Use onsite staff

Residents find responsive onsite staff helpful in cutting through detail and jargon to deliver information and demonstrate safety procedures more informally

Use onsite staff like concierges or caretakers to help residents understand what the information means to them

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Communicate information effectively

Considerations



Create personal testimonials or case studies of people's experiences of building safety.

These can help residents to understand and relate to key safety messages



Consider setting up an online group for residents.

These can enable residents to cascade information to their neighbours, and ask each other questions about safety matters in their building



Visit Accessible communication formats - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

if you would like further guidance on how to ensure your communications are accessible

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4

Listen to residents

Residents feel safer when they can reach out to building owners/managers simply and straightforwardly whenever they need to. Make it easy for residents to request information, respond to a consultation, raise concerns and escalate complaints.

When is this relevant?

For residents who wish to request and access building and safety information from APs

For residents who wish to respond to a consultation, or raise concerns and complaints to APs



Key principles

1

Ensure residents can reach you

Residents need to be able to get in touch with you in ways that suit them

Create flexible, multi-channel processes that allow residents to reach you via email, phone, face-to-face and online

2

Provide a visible, easy-to-navigate complaints process

Residents need the complaints process to be transparent and clearly set out

Provide step-by-step details of how a complaint will be handled and the timescales involved, with a named contact for residents to check the status of their complaint

3

Tailor responses to resident needs

Residents frequently feel their complaints are neither heard nor taken seriously

Keep residents informed of the progress of their complaint via their preferred communications channel, and provide opportunities to discuss steps to help to resolve issues both individually and as a group of residents

4

Clarify your role

Residents do not always understand who is responsible for the safety of their building

Make clear what your role and responsibilities are for building safety, your commitment to residents and when residents should engage with BSR to escalate concerns

5

Signpost residents

Residents have broader concerns than just fire and building safety

Consider what happens to residents' complaints which fall outside of APs' remits and be prepared to signpost residents to appropriate agencies to support them with other concerns

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Considerations



Check-in with residents during the design of the complaints

process and request feedback once up and running to make continual improvements



Design a non-discriminatory complaints process

that offers alternative ways to raise and investigate complaints, such as accepting anonymous complaints from residents, allowing complaints to be made collectively with other residents, or carrying out spot checks on buildings



Help to build and maintain trust in your organisation

by working together with residents to resolve issues and demonstrating you are transparent and responsive

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Be inclusive of everyone – non-English speakers

Non-English speaking residents (or those with very little English) face additional barriers that limit them from engaging with building safety. Understand what these barriers are, and how to remove them, so that all residents feel and are safer.

Equality Act 2010

The Act requires providers of services to take steps to ensure discrimination does not occur due to inaccessible information and underpins fire safety legislation that all people can leave a building safely in the event of a fire.

Key insights

- Non-English speaking residents are more likely than the wider high-rise population to be social renters and live in multiple occupancy dwellings
- They may lack contextual understanding of building and fire safety (e.g. be unfamiliar with the Grenfell Tower Fire) and be uncertain of their role in keeping themselves and others safe
- Knowledge of basic building and fire safety in high-rise buildings in England is generally low (e.g. dialling 999, not using lifts to evacuate, what 'stay put' means)
- Some building safety concepts and words may not be understood and may not have direct translations into other languages e.g. no word for 'sprinklers' in Bengali
- Their engagement and trust with building management may be impacted by previous negative and sometimes engrained broader experiences of authority
- They frequently have other considerations that may affect engagement in building safety i.e. health conditions, low levels of literacy (including in their own language) and they have a propensity to be less digitally able

Key principles

1

Assume no prior knowledge of building safety

Take building safety information back to basics when educating residents e.g. explain how fire alarms and sprinkler systems work and who is responsible for maintaining them

2

Use formats that support translations

Residents find ways to translate important information so ensure information is easy to drop into translation software i.e. avoid PDF formats, use simple and jargon-free content

3

Make use of translation facilities yourself

Add QR codes to leaflets or posters to allow readers to access information in multiple languages, or use tools such as Browsealoud to translate online content

4

Role play basic safety scenarios

Provide videos and/or give scenarios, descriptions or opportunities to play out what might happen in an emergency i.e. how to call 999 and what to say

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Facilitate in-person activities

Consider holding safety coffee mornings, estate walkabouts and safety workshops with interpretation provided to ensure non-English speaking residents feel included (some cultures prefer verbal communications)

6

Ensure printed information is available and relatable

Always print safety information so residents can show this to, and discuss with, people who they trust. Family and friends are often turned to, to help explain information. Include pictures of people of similar backgrounds in homes that look like theirs

7

Work with trusted sources

Consider investigating how other people and organisations can help to raise awareness and share messages about building safety e.g. faith leaders, community spaces and local Fire and Rescue Services

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Be inclusive of everyone – disabled residents

Residents with extra support requirements because of a disability or long-term health condition face additional barriers that limit them from engaging with building safety. Understand what these barriers are, and how to remove them, so that all residents feel and are safer.

Equality Act 2010

The Act requires providers of services to take steps to ensure discrimination does not occur due to inaccessible information and underpins fire safety legislation that all people can leave a building safely in the event of a fire.

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Key insights

- Residents who identify as having a disability or long-term health condition are more likely to be social renters, longer-term residents and older than the wider high-rise population
- Residents may have a broad range of conditions (e.g. mobility, neurodivergent, mental health, or sensory) that impact on their daily life in different ways. These conditions may, or may not, be visible and may fluctuate from day-to-day
- Feelings of safety for those with additional support needs are closely linked to evacuation plans and means of escape (and Grenfell is still prominent for many)
- Many residents with specific support requirements do not relate to the term 'disabled' (e.g. age-related decline in mobility, acquiring a disability later in life, or conditions that make it difficult to process information), but instead relate to their specific condition or need
- Residents with extra support requirements frequently feel underserved by building managers owing to the additional barriers that affect their interactions with them
- Many feel isolated and undervalued. Responsive on-site staff, such as caretakers or security, and a sense of community can bolster feelings of safety and provide an important and empathetic human connection

Key principles

1

Use language that relates to specific conditions/needs (rather than labelling residents as disabled or generalising)

Engage with residents using neutral and inclusive language that discusses their safety requirements respectfully e.g.:

'Do you need support with walking down the stairs?'

'Do you struggle to follow instructions?'

'Can you hear alarms?'



5

Be inclusive of everyone – disabled residents

Key principles

2

Ensure evacuation plans are inclusive

Increase resident confidence by designing evacuation plans jointly. Consider making adaptations to residents' homes and communal spaces, if required, to accommodate their needs:

- Accessible fire alarm systems i.e. sensory alarms that vibrate or flash
- Clearly marked routes with adequate lighting and tonal contrasting
- Accessible fire doors
- Way-finding descriptions with very detailed instructions i.e. number of steps, which direction to turn

3

Educate and understand

Make sure residents understand plans and routes by holding regular fire tests and safety drills with the chance to ask questions. Be respectful of the impact a resident's disability/condition has on their ability and propensity to fulfil their duties (e.g. someone who is neurodivergent may need plenty of notice, or a carer present, if you wish to access their flat)

4

Build connected communities

Help residents to feel less isolated, more supported and ultimately safer by hosting get-togethers (e.g. coffee mornings, safety workshops) and setting up community apps that bring residents closer together

5

Work with partners

Identify other people and organisations who may be able to help you to understand, work with and communicate with residents with additional safety requirements e.g. concierges, caretakers, community adult social care teams, disability groups, and local Fire and Rescue Services

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References

1.
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