

Southwark

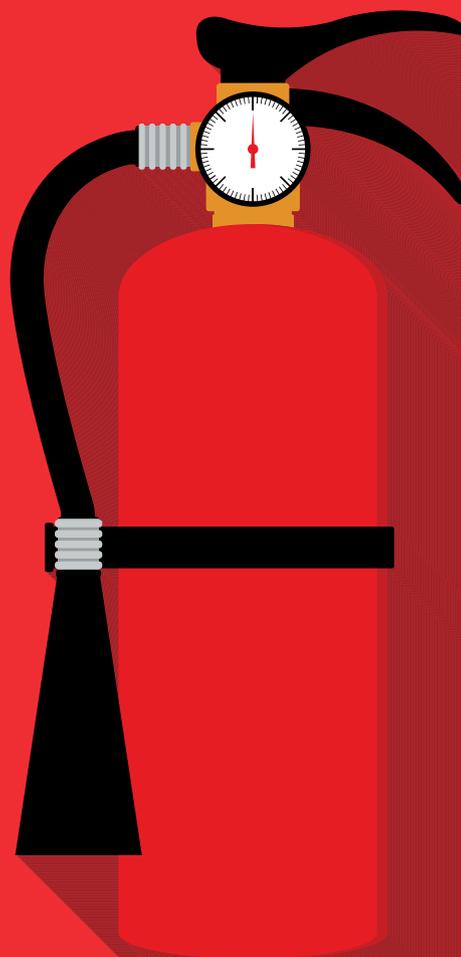
Life

July 2017

FIRE SAFETY SPECIAL

Inside:

- What Southwark has done to make homes safer
- What you can do
- A day in the life of a fire safety officer



Your magazine from Southwark Council

Southwark
Council
southwark.gov.uk

Top fire safety tips for residents

As a council, we are doing all that we can to keep our residents safe from the devastating consequences of a major fire, but you can help too by following this advice:

- ✓ Make sure you have a working smoke alarm in your home
- ✓ Keep balconies free from clutter
- ✓ Please don't leave rubbish or bikes in communal areas or obstruct escape routes
- ✓ Make sure you know where your nearest fire exit is
- ✓ If you live in a council property, please don't smoke in common areas
- ✓ Always fully extinguish cigarettes smoked in your home and dispose of them carefully and safely
- ✓ Please don't use barbecues on balconies or common parts because of the risk of fire.
- ✓ If you are concerned that your neighbours may be compromising fire safety in your block or home, please report this to the council.





welcome...

Dear resident,

We take fire safety extremely seriously in Southwark. After the awful fire at Lakanal in our own borough in 2009, in which six people tragically lost their lives, we have learned many lessons and transformed the way we assess and respond to fire risk.

After the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington last month, no landlord or homeowner can be complacent. It's important that we all keep fire safety at the front of our minds. There are many things we can all do to keep ourselves safe from fire, and this special edition of Southwark Life reminds us of some simple tips for staying safe. But fire safety needs to be a top priority for landlords too and Southwark Council needs to reassure you, our residents, that we've done all we can across the borough to improve fire safety since Lakanal. The article on P4 explains what we have done, and why, and I hope you will find this useful. It includes spending £62m on improving the fire safety of council homes, and the establishment of a dedicated fire safety team of 15, including former firefighters. On

P6 we talk to one of them – our Fire Safety Manager Dave Rowson – about his journey from the fire brigade to Southwark Council, and what his day to day work involves.

I know this is a very difficult time for Londoners. After the dreadful attacks in London Bridge and Borough just a few weeks ago, the fire at Grenfell has compounded our sense of grief and added to a general nervousness across our city. None of us can guarantee that any home – council, housing association or privately owned – is completely safe from fire, but there is a lot we can all do to reduce the risk of it happening, and containing its spread. I hope you find this special edition of Southwark Life helpful, both in reassuring you about what the council has done, and reminding you what you can do to make your homes more safe.

CLlr Stephanie Cryan
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Housing

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Contact us

Do you have something to say about Southwark Life? Write to: Your letters, Southwark Life, Fourth Floor North, Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street London, SE1 2QH or email southwark.life@southwark.gov.uk

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Keep in touch

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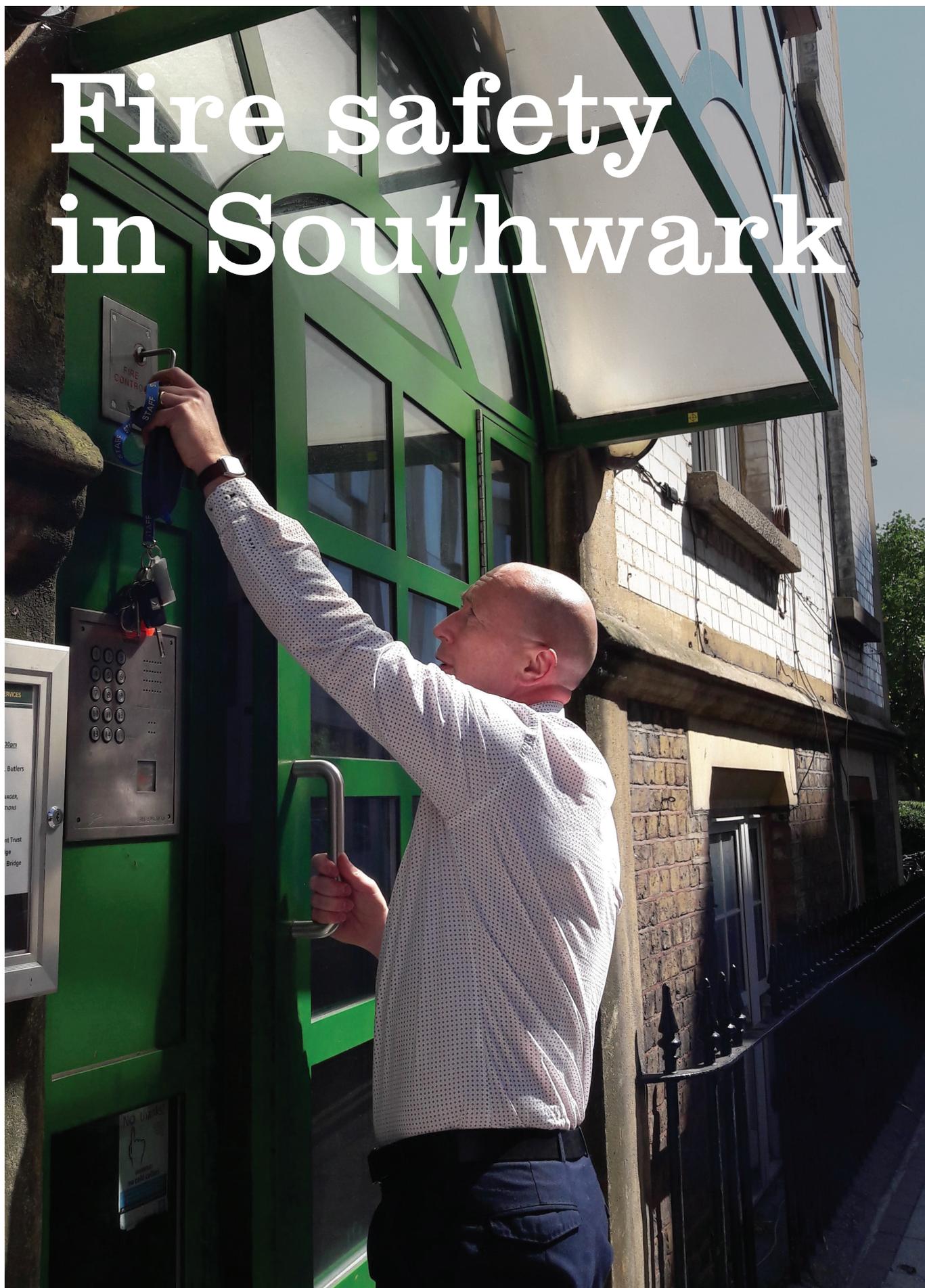
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Fire safety in Southwark



Before Grenfell, the last major tower block fire in London was in Southwark, at Lakanal. It was a terrible event in our borough's history and tragically six people lost their lives.

The council has apologised for its failings which contributed to the tragedy, and following the inquests into their deaths, the Coroner made a number of recommendations to the council, London Fire Brigade and government.

Since that time Southwark has transformed its approach to fire safety. Following the fire, the council began an ongoing programme to ensure all its properties received a regular full fire risk assessment, beginning with those deemed to be high risk.

Since 2009 the council has spent £62 million on its fire risk assessment programme and associated fire safety works for all its council housing in the borough. In February 2015, all fire risk works to all high rise and lower/more complex housing were complete, but this work is ongoing and risk assessments are regularly reviewed, and always after major works are carried out to a building.

Our focus has been on preventing fires, having early warning systems (heat and smoke alarms in every habitable room) and preventing those that do occur from spreading through better compartmentation, which experts agree should be the focus.

The council works closely with London Fire Brigade (LFB) and meets regularly with them, to look at changing risks and other issues. LFB assists the council in advising residents on fire safety and fitting smoke alarms inside their homes.

Cladding

None of Southwark's 174 tower blocks have combustible cladding, but we are investigating cladding on four of our low-rise blocks and will take whatever action is needed, keeping residents informed.

Lakanal

Lakanal has recently reopened after a major transformation with fire safety at its heart. External panels have been replaced, fire doors fitted throughout, new signage installed, and crucially the block has been compartmentalised to ensure should a fire break out, it can be contained where it started instead of spreading to other flats and shared spaces. These improvements have been shown to work - a fire that broke out in Lakanal's sister block Marie Curie in 2010 was completely contained within one bedroom due largely to the major fire safety works carried out during late 2009/early 2010.



Fire safety review

Southwark Council has appointed national fire safety expert, Ben Bradford, and his specialist firm of consulting engineers, to carry out an independent review of the council's fire strategy and fire risk assessments.

Following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in North Kensington, Southwark committed to commissioning a review, to reassure residents and ensure that all fire safety policies and procedures are appropriate.

The review will begin this month, and is expected to report back to the council in the autumn.

The government has asked all landlords to provide samples of their cladding, and we are keeping a close eye on the results from local Housing Associations, schools and hospitals. If major issues are identified we will work with the landlords/owners to make sure swift action is taken to make the buildings safe.

Sprinklers

Fire safety is complex, and although sprinklers are one way

to manage fire risk, in Southwark we have focused instead, working with the LFB, on prevention, early warning and compartmentation in our normal housing blocks. Compartmentation is work to stop fire spreading so that any fire is contained within one room or flat until the fire brigade can arrive to put it out. Remember, if a fire breaks out in your home, the advice is to leave immediately and call 999. We have installed sprinklers in our sheltered housing and hostels, as more vulnerable residents might struggle to walk away from a fire. As part of our fire safety review, and in light of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, we will be looking again at whether sprinklers should be rolled out across our tower blocks.

Get involved

The council is asking residents to come forward and join a new fire safety advisory group that will help steer the council's next steps following the review. If you are interested please email **CommunityEngagement@southwark.gov.uk**

More information

The council has published detailed information about fire safety, and answers to questions you have been asking us, on our website at **www.southwark.gov.uk/firesafety**

Day in the life of a fire safety expert

Dave Rowson, former LFB firefighter and Fire Safety Manager for Southwark Council tells us about an average day.

I was a firefighter for London Fire Brigade for over 30 years, eight years of which I worked in regulatory fire safety before joining Southwark Council in 2015. During my fire officer career, I worked with a large number of housing landlords, helping them to improve their fire safety to meet or exceed the required standards.

At Southwark Council, I manage an in-house team of 15 people and our remit is to carry out fire risk assessments for the buildings which house the council's 54,000 homes – both tenant and leasehold. Once we have carried out the risk assessments, we ensure work is carried out to fix any problems.

A fire risk assessment is a statutory, government requirement to survey and assess both the good and the bad in any building. We look at all common areas of our estates, means of escape, management and structure of the building. We sample individual properties and work alongside our tenant management teams to address individual issues.

My day starts at 7am and while site checks are important, the lion's share of the work actually involves being at my desk to oversee and react to what comes in. We don't have an on-call rota, but we do work long hours between us as there's plenty to do. In some instances I might do a site visit but

that part of work is mostly carried out by our team of surveyors and fire safety officers – who are very experienced and some of the best in the country, in my opinion.

We don't just focus on the reactive; we also actively enforce fire safety in our homes. We apply a zero tolerance approach to escape routes and insist that residents remove iron security doors or window grilles and anything obstructing exits – such as doormats, bikes, white goods and rubbish. Otherwise, the council will remove them. I can appreciate that this can be frustrating for tenants, but we do take their safety very seriously indeed.

We also work closely with London Fire Brigade to offer advice in the home – the importance of fitting and testing smoke alarms, which we will fit for free, keeping internal doors closed at night and escape routes clear. We encourage private residents with street-level properties to have a personal escape plan, which they can get help with from LFB by calling 0800 028 4428.

All our fire risk assessments are up to date, but we need to continue to be flexible and open to change – to follow current guidance and review our processes as often as we can. I am very passionate about fire safety, and it's my mission for everyone to be safe in Southwark.



Your questions answered

Lots of you have been in touch since the Grenfell tragedy with a range of questions. Here is a selection of the most frequently asked, with our responses. A full FAQ is available at www.southwark.gov.uk/firesafety

Will you stop building high rise buildings in light of Grenfell?

Southwark is a tiny borough geographically, with huge demand for housing. We have a council housing waiting list of 11,000, and demand for all types of home. Realistically, the only way to meet this need is to build upwards. Tower blocks are not inherently unsafe, but as a country we need to make sure that building regulations are fit for purpose and all homes are as safe as they can be.

Will we be publishing our fire risk assessments?

Yes we are working on this now and will publish them on our website as soon as possible.

Why are there no fire extinguishers in our blocks?

Because we do not expect residents to fight fires in our blocks. If a fire breaks out in your property or block, call the fire brigade immediately.

What extra checks has Southwark Council carried out in response to the Grenfell fire?

We have checked all our tower blocks for cladding and none were of concern. We sent samples from four low-rise blocks for testing. We await the results. We are also carrying out new Fire Risk Assessments for all our blocks, and have visited many properties to investigate specific issues identified by residents.

How can I be sure my home is as safe as it can be?

The London Fire Brigade offers free home fire safety visits. To book yours go to www.london-fire.gov.uk/HomeFireSafetyVisit.asp or call 0800 028 44 28.

Our gas pipes have been moved to the outside of our block. Isn't that dangerous?

It is standard practice to install new pipework externally, which is safe and allows the gas company to easily access pipes if a leak develops, and maintain them.

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