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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Fire Safety in HMOs

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Good Practice Guidance for landlords of licensable HMOs

South Oxfordshire District Council

Listening Learning Leading

Vale of White Horse

Cherwell DISTRICT COUNCIL North Oxfordshire

July 2006 *[Revised October 2007]*

Preface

Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire District Councils have produced this guide in partnership with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to assist and provide advice for owners, landlords and agents on the requirements for Means of Escape in Case of Fire and other Fire Precautions for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that are required to be licensed under the Housing Act 2004.

This guidance provides a brief overview of the requirements of fire precautions in such premises and is not intended to represent a works schedule.

Contents

1 Introduction

This guidance covers only those properties that are subject to mandatory licensing, i.e. HMOs comprising three or more storeys and which five or more persons occupy. Further guidance may have to be produced if local authorities adopt additional HMO licensing under the Housing Act 2004.

The Housing Act 2004 provides for local authorities to adopt a risk appropriate enforcement programme under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, (HHSRS), when dealing with the standards of fire safety in HMOs. However, under the provisions of HMO licensing all HMOs must be provided with appropriate fire precautions. This guide aims to assist landlords of such HMOs in meeting those requirements.

The main areas covered in this guidance include the category and grade of fire detection and fire alarm systems and standards for fire resisting elements to prevent the spread fire and the products of combustion.

A fire-engineered solution may be acceptable for any category of HMO as long as the requirements below are fulfilled, see ‘Design Freedoms for Houses in Multiple Occupation when incorporating Residential Sprinkler Systems’ available from your Local Authority or Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

2 The Requirements

The building shall be designed and constructed so that any resident or visitor within the property can be readily alerted to the outbreak of fire and, as far as is reasonably practicable can easily escape from the building in the safest manner possible. This will be achieved by ensuring there is adequate provision for: -

- an early warning system in the form of a mains-wired fire detection and alarm system. In general terms, the larger the building and/or occupancy risks, the higher category of alarm system will be required.
- a protected route, i.e., fire-resisting walls, partitions and doors: This is required in order that a fire is contained and prevented from spreading onto the escape routes. The protected route may be required to have emergency lighting.
- appropriate fire fighting equipment to allow a small, under-developed fire to be easily and safely extinguished

3 Risk Assessment

A risk assessment of each HMO will be undertaken when it is inspected for licensing purposes. This risk assessment will be based on that used in the ENTEC report and other documents as indicated below. The property will be graded as low, medium or high risk and the following is a broad indication of the criteria.

- size, layout and number of storeys; the larger the building the higher the risk
- occupant characteristics; elderly, disadvantaged, disabled and young children present a higher risk
- ignition sources; a building with a higher number of kitchens or domestic premises above commercial premises will present a higher risk
- quality and visible level of management
- Means of exit; habitable rooms having an openable door (or window) through which emergency egress to a place of safety is achievable (escape windows should comply with Approved Document B, Building Regulations) (ADB)
- habitable rooms not being inner-rooms (as defined in ADB)
- any habitable room having a suitable means of egress other than through a higher-risk area (*e.g.,* kitchen)

The above list is not exhaustive and inspecting officers will use their discretion to establish the level of risk present in any HMO. *e.g.,* where there are increased numbers of kitchens or cooking facilities in rooms the level of fire precautions will be greater to address the increase in risk.

If there are significant changes in the numbers occupying or the type of occupancy, the fire precautions may need to be of a higher standard, this may require upgrading of existing alarm systems.

The following references will be used in compiling the risk assessment:

- Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Sleeping Accommodation – HM Government (ISBN: 978 1 85112 8174) or free to download from the website www.firesafetyguide.communities.gov.uk
- ENTEC report published in 1999 (ISBN 0117534439)
- BS 5839 – 1 : 2002 Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings -
- Part 1: Code of practice for system design, installation, commissioning and maintenance
- BS 5839 – 6 : 2004 Fire detection and fire alarm systems for dwellings -
- Part 6: Code of practice for the design, installation and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in dwellings
- Building Regulations 2000 Fire Safety, Approved Document B (ADB) 2006 Edition
- Fire Statistics, United Kingdom, 2004 (ISBN 13-9781851128433)

4 Categories of HMOs.

All HMOs covered by this guidance will be required to have a protected route (which may also require emergency lighting) a fire detection and fire alarm system and fire fighting equipment. Inspecting officers will use their professional judgement when deciding what standards of these are appropriate in each case. The levels of protection are to be used as a benchmark and officers can adjust the level of protective measures as appropriate to the level of risk present within the premises concerned.

4.1 Low Risk – Houses Occupied on a Shared Basis (3 storeys)

***Example**: no more than five able bodied adults, sharing one kitchen and where the property is well managed*

Fire Detection System

- a fire alarm system installed to BS 5839 Part 6, grade D category LD2 (*see* Page 7)

Protected Route

- doors that open onto escape routes must be of 30-minute fire-resisting construction fitted with intumescent strips, cold smoke seals and a self closing device

Cupboards

- cupboards on the protected route should either be of a 30 minute fire resisting standard or be emptied and kept locked shut

Partitions

- wall separation between room and escape route should be of 30 minute fire resisting standard

Floors and Ceilings

- floors and ceilings should be of 30 minute fire resisting standard; this includes the ceiling to the top of the staircase and any loft hatch

Fire Fighting Equipment

- wall mounted fire blanket complying with BS EN 1869: 1997 in the kitchen and a 1kg dry powder fire extinguisher to be provided in the kitchen

Emergency Lighting

- to be installed as necessary in common parts eg where there is no adequate borrowed external light or where there are changes in level. It should be installed in accordance with BS 5266: Part1:2005 or equivalent.

4.2 High Risk – Houses Occupied on a Shared Basis (3 or more storeys)

***Example**: the elderly, disabled or young children, overcrowding issues or where the levels of management are consistently poor, or where there are multiple cooking facilities*

Fire Detection System

- a fire alarm system installed to BS 5839 Part 6, grade A category LD1 (*see* Page 7)

Protected Route

- doors that open onto escape routes must be of 30-minute fire-resisting construction fitted with intumescent strips, cold smoke seals and a self closing device

Cupboards

- cupboards on the protected route should either be of a 30 minute fire resisting standard or be emptied and kept locked shut

Partitions

- wall separation between room and escape route must be of 30 minute fire resisting standard

Floors and Ceilings

- floors and ceilings must be of 30 minute fire resisting standard; this includes the ceiling to the top of the staircase and any loft hatch

Fire Fighting Equipment

- wall mounted fire blanket complying with BS EN 1869 1997 and a 1kg dry powder fire extinguisher to be provided in all rooms where there are cooking facilities

Emergency Lighting

- to be installed as necessary in common parts eg where there is no adequate borrowed external light or where there are changes in level. It should be installed in accordance with BS 5266: Part1:2005 or equivalent.

4.3 Basements

Where a property in either of the above examples includes a basement the following applies

- 30-minutes fire separation should be provided between ground and basement level
- An automatic fire detection system may be required which will be linked to the fire warning system throughout the property
- Where basement is accessed from within the ground floor, two 30-minute fire doors should be provided (one at the top and one at the bottom of the flight of

stairs leading to the basement) unless there is a separate exit from each habitable room from the basement

- The staircase and spandrel must be constructed to provide 30 minute fire resistance. All habitable rooms within the basement must be provided with an escape window or door in accordance with current edition of the Building Regulations (ABD)

5 General Provisions applying to all HMOs

Fire Detection System

Where more than one smoke detector/alarm is installed they must be inter-linked. Heat detectors/alarms must also be interlinked with the smoke detectors/alarms

All wiring for alarm systems is to be carried out following the recommendations for design, installation, testing and certification in BS7671: 2001, 'Requirements for Electrical Installations – IEE Wiring Regulations'. Unless a registered installer carries out the works, notification with the Building Control Department will be required

Notices and Signs

Fire-routine notices must be provided and sited adjacent to manual break glass call points (where installed).

Fire Door 'Keep Shut' notices to be fitted to all doors on protected routes, with the exception of bedroom doors or flat entrance doors. Where a cupboard door has no self-closing device fitted a 'Fire Door Keep Locked' notice will be required.

Directional notices as required following risk assessment.

Locks on Doors

Lockable doors, which are accessed from the escape route, and all final exit doors must be easily openable from the inside without the use of a key

Commercial Premises

Commercial and residential premises must be separated by 60-minutes fire-resisting structure

Fire Plans

It is recommended that a Fire Plan is devised and put into effect and that occupants are made aware of the plan, so that in the event of a fire they know how to call out the Fire and Rescue Service.

Maintaining the Escape Route

In the event of fire, the occupants of your house will have to leave the house by using the escape route (*i.e.,* the stairs and corridors). Lighting levels may be low and there may be smoke. It is therefore essential that the escape route is maintained free from obstruction at all times.

The following items are not permitted on the escape route:-

- Portable heaters of any type
- Heaters with unprotected naked flames or radiant bars
- Fixed heaters using a gas supply cylinder
- Oil-fuelled heaters

- Cookers
- Upholstered furniture including mattresses and fabric wall hangings
- Wardrobe or other storage furniture
- Coat racks
- Storage of any kind (unless it is kept in a locked cupboard which is constructed to the same standard of fire resistance as the enclosure to the stairway

Building Regulations

Any structural work to the property must be in accordance with the current Building Regulations, for further advice with this matter contact your local Building Control Service.

6 Definition relating to Fire Alarm Systems and grading

BS 5839 – 6 : 2004

Fire detection and fire alarm systems for dwellings -

Part 6: Code of practice for the design, installation and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in dwellings

System Category:

Category LD – Protection of life

LD1 a system installed throughout the dwelling, incorporating detectors in all circulation spaces that form part of the escape routes from the dwelling, and in all rooms and areas in which fire might start, other than toilets, bathrooms and shower rooms.

LD2 a system incorporating detectors in all circulation spaces that form part of the escape routes from the dwelling, and in all rooms or areas that present a high fire risk to occupants (following risk assessment). The specification for a type LD2 system should always include details of the areas or rooms of the dwelling that are to be protected.

System Grade:

Grades B and C are included for completeness and to help general understanding

A A fire detection and alarm system which incorporates control and indicating equipment conforming to BS EN 54-2 and which is designed, installed and serviced in accordance with all the recommendations of BS 5839 pt 1 (with certain substituted clauses, see BS5839: pt 6).

B A fire-detection and alarm system comprising fire detectors, fire alarm sounders, and control and indicating equipment which either conforms with BS EN 54-2 or BS5839-6 Annex C.

C A system of fire detectors and alarm sounders (which may be combined in one unit) connected to a common power supply, comprising the normal mains and a stand by supply, with an element of central control.

D A system of one or more mains-powered smoke alarms, each with an integral power supply (the system may include heat alarms).