

FIRE SAFETY & THE RESIDENTS' VOICE

Exploring the important role residents will play in the future of residential fire safety

Introduction

Mark Varley – Group Head of Health & Safety, FirstPort

Grenfell has changed residential building safety forever.

Our first speaker is Dame Judith Hackitt, who led the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety in 2017. At the heart of the Review is a greater role for residents, rightly, as trust needs to be rebuilt. Residents must have a greater access to information and a greater involvement in decision making.

Next we're going to hear from experts with a focus on the residents' voice. As Protection Vice Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Nick Coombe will focus on three principles of positive residents' engagement. Following him we have four case studies: the first looking at effective fire prevention measures and the importance of fire doors; the second looks at the work of a fire assessor and the importance of being given access by residents; thirdly we'll learn how resident engagement is working in practice at United Living, and our final case study looks at how we might make better use of technology to engage more immediately with residents and give them a platform to make their voice heard.



Where are we two years on from Grenfell?

Dame Judith Hackitt – Chair of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety

Despite the fact the Review is complete and the recommendations are being implemented – all of them – I'm delighted to say by the Government, I think it's really important we keep this dialogue going because the longer we go post-Grenfell, the more concerned I become that we will allow this to fall away and we will not respond appropriately to change this broken system or ours. We must rebuild the trust that residents, and the public more generally, no longer have in us and in the system to provide them with somewhere safe to live.

In addition to talking to different audiences about the Review I do still have a formal role in its implementation; my role now is to chair the Industry Safety Steering Group. The Group is comprised of senior people from industries other than the construction industry, and our task is to focus those who build and manage the buildings we're all concerned about to drive culture change and change the way they see their role. At the heart of what we're talking about here is the need for them to recognise that they are responsible for delivering buildings that are safe for people to live in. That's not their focus at the moment, but that is where we have to drive the change to, that is where we have to get the construction and building management industry to focus its attention.

But let's talk about residents, because I think this is a really, really important area, and certainly during conducting the course of my Review back in the latter half of 2017, I spoke to a lot of residents.

Let's be positive first of all. I heard some very good practice. I spoke to some groups of residents for whom being part of a community in a high rise building was actually a very positive experience, they felt engaged, they felt their landlords cared about them – or their managing agents – whatever the managing structure was, they felt involved.

But equally I spoke to many other residents who had truly heart breaking stories to tell. Stories about being afraid, for their own safety, concerned about the state of the building, frustrated because they'd raised concerns and no one had listened to them, and concerned because they didn't know where to go for answers.

SO, THERE IS A LOT THAT WE NEED TO DO.

I also feel that we have to recognise that as a result of Grenfell, people's attitudes to fire safety have changed, and changed, forever.

I will always remember the resident I met in Manchester who told me she had been out, since Grenfell, to buy a cat box, that is now by the front door. She said: "I don't care what anyone tells me anymore. That cat box is there because if there's a fire in this building, I'm not staying put. The cat's going in the box, and we're getting out."

That I think reflects a change we've seen in people.

If we ask them to do things that don't make sense, that doesn't resonate, that's not a good idea, they're simply not going to do it. It's really important that we recognise that this isn't just about us satisfying ourselves that we have done the right things it is truly about rebuilding confidence and trust.

So what did my report say about this? It said, residents must be listened to. But more than that, they need to be engaged in the process. Also, and we must not forget this either, that they also have responsibilities. If we are going to make a new system more effective and better for everyone, part of our dialogue with residents must not just be about giving them the information that they need but is also about getting them to realise they are an integral part of that system and there are things that they can do, things that they can't do, and things that they must do. So we really do need to make them part of keeping their buildings safe.

They have a right to know about the condition of the building they are living in and that will be an integral part of the process of regular reporting, on the condition of the buildings and sharing that information with residents. They need to know what the critical safety features are and there needs to be a system in place for them to raise their concerns and to know that they're going to get them listened to and acted upon.

As I said, I have heard about good practice already. But there's not enough of it. So the more we can build up these stories of good practice the more we can demonstrate, not just that things are possible, but that they are practical and they work, so the harder it will be for the laggards in the system to continue to sit on their hands and not do anything.

We are all going to have to challenge those who continue to perpetuate bad practice and the best way to do that is to show them what is possible and hold them to account when they are not doing similar.

There is a new regulatory regime coming that will be based, in the case of high rise buildings, round the safety case and make no mistake the new Regulator, the Joint Competent Authority, will involve residents in that process.

Anyone who has ever been involved in an inspection by the Health and Safety Executive will know that they never take your word for it when you tell them that your management system for Health and Safety is good. They check with employees, whether what they've been told is actually

happening in practice. They will do the same as part of that Joint Competent Authority when it comes to checking out whether what's written in the safety case is actually there in practice and whether the people who are part of the system, including residents, understand that, have been informed about it and know what they have to do.

ENGAGEMENT OF RESIDENTS WILL BE INTEGRAL IN OUR NEW REGULATORY SYSTEM.

For me what's most important is we shouldn't be doing it because the law tells us we have to. The reason we should be doing this, and the reason we need to engage and involve residents is because we've let them down and we have to rebuild trust and confidence in all of us, and in the whole system so that they not only feel safe, but that they're really part of the system. Not so that they feel that things are just done to them, or that they're ignored, or that they're not valued and don't matter. They do matter. They matter a lot. We're talking about their homes and communities. We owe it to them to rebuild confidence and trust and help them to feel safe.

The importance of educating residents on the impact of their actions

Nick Coombe – Protection Vice Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council

I think it was clear after what happened at Grenfell that residents felt they were mistreated and betrayed for a number of reasons. Our role is to try and regain that confidence. Some of you will be thinking, that's fine, but some people don't want to be engaged with. And we have to accept that as well, that not every resident wants to know everything. Some residents only stay for a few weeks at your building, depending on their circumstances. So we need to be practical and pragmatic.

ENGAGEMENT AND LISTENING

For me there are three key areas. It's about clear lines of responsibility around what residents have to do and what Duty Holders have to do. Secondly resident engagement, which is about influencing on both sides, and thirdly residents' information, which is about responsible residents.

Any safety regime starts at the top of an organisation. Secondly, residents need to know their responsibilities. There's been a lot spoken about Duty Holder responsibilities, but residents need to know what their responsibilities are as well. In my experience in the Fire Service you have residents who do everything they can, you have some who do things in ignorance because they don't understand that what they do in their flat impacts on others, and then you've got a group of people who just want to do what they want to do. They're the difficult people to reach and they're the harder people to reach. If we can help the second category who don't know what they're doing is wrong that would be a really big win for the whole sector.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?

Primarily this group need to know who is responsible for what, and how. We have a Housing Ombudsman, Registers of Social Landlords, and numerous Complaints Procedures. Fire Services have a procedure so that any complaint received is dealt with according to proper procedures, timelines and by positions of people in authority. As Grenfell highlighted residents were worried that if they made a complaint the landlord might take issue with them. So we need to change the culture so that people can feel safe wherever they are.

We need to agree what to tell residents going forward. I've seen some very convoluted explanations about who to approach depending on the issue. Ideally, there should be a single point of contact. That could be the Duty Holder or a Property Manager or Managing Agent.

When we talk about engagement with residents it needs to be at the very beginning. At the design stage. I hope that when the Joint Competent Authority looks at this it will insist that residents are consulted at the design stage because these buildings – many of which will last for a hundred years – will need to be flexible enough to accommodate the differing needs of families as they grow older. We have to future proof our buildings according to our residents' needs. Especially in the social sector, they're not always going to be young families with children. Children will grow up and leave but parents stay.

FIRES HAPPEN AROUND PEOPLE

That's why engagement is so vital. There are lots of examples of good practice – residents' meetings, block days where information is handed out, newsletters, leaflets. But it has to be a sustained effort. The senior management team have to buy into this long term. Governance is key here. This is not a quick fix.

Whenever you're doing major works on a building, you have to plan, consult and monitor. Rather than just share the before and after plans you also need to consider the situation whilst the works are going on. Will certain exits be shut off? Are things being moved around? Residents will need to know this stuff.

As soon as you share with people how any major works are going to be phased, week by week it naturally helps them know what is going on.

Moving on to information, what does 'safe' look like? Think of it from a resident's point of view. Bombarding them with information taken from the Fire Risk Assessment indicating there are numerous faults with the building – but that it is predominantly safe – show that to a lay person and they will only focus on the comments that make them jump to a conclusion they're living in a death trap. So you have to explain what safe looks like. Sharing a Fire Risk Assessment on a portal is not properly disclosing to a resident everything they need to know.

Partnerships, too, are important. You cannot do this on your own. Fire Rescue Services want to help, Environmental Health Officers want to help, the Health and Safety Executive wants to help and they all need to be engaged with you at the various stages of your information gathering. Also, learn from others, lots of people are doing really good work, share best practice. I'm hoping the JCA will share examples of what safe looks like when they work through their programme.

This Charter for a Responsible Resident is really important. I've seen residents use the water suppression pipe thinking it's an extra rail. I've seen a wardrobe put in front of a sprinkler without the resident realising it wouldn't possibly work with something in its way. So the information shared with a resident has to be specific to them and their building.

ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS

You need to provide the resident an opportunity to give their opinion back. We all need to listen to what they have to say rather than just provide them with information.

Finally, we all know this isn't going to be cheap. Investment in people, in resources and thinking long-term are all going to now need a sustained effort. Pre-Grenfell the world wasn't all right and post 14 June 2017, a terrible fire changed our minds forever. The situation had been deteriorating for years and years. To fix it will take a long time. If you think this can be done in two or three years' time, you're in the wrong place.

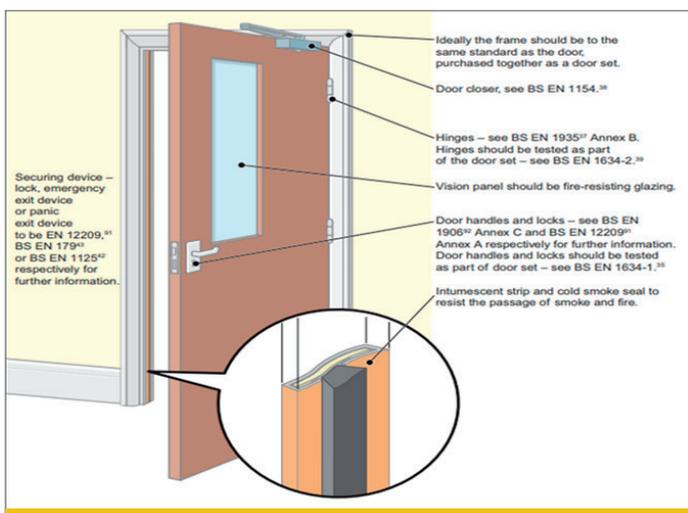
Case study 1: Fire doors and residents' safety

Andy Wright – Primary Authority Scheme Manager, Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue

Flat front doors are a source of much debate in our sector.

Invariably when I'm invited to attend residents' meetings its generally because something has gone wrong. As the illustration below shows a fire door is equipped with a number of security features that a lay person might easily take for granted.

It's important to appreciate that a resident's knowledge of what a fire door actually does will vary from person to person. If they've fitted their own door to their apartment they may be unaware that it might not meet fire safety standards.



A common example of residents' lack of knowledge about the main safety features of a fire door is overlooking the importance of the closer at the top. On an inspection there may be no closure on their door. It's my job to investigate why this is. Has it been removed because they took it off temporarily whilst manoeuvring furniture into their flat? Was it never fitted? Or, for example, was it taken off because a frail resident couldn't manage to open the door and so had it taken off to help her get in and out.

Using language that residents understand is important. It might just be a door, but in the event of a fire it might just save their life. In the event of a fire, if the closer is working properly, when you leave your flat the door closes behind you and so compartmentalises your part of the building. This will help to reduce the spread of the fire. Or at the very least hold up its progress before help arrives.

FIRE KILLS, BUT YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO DIE THROUGH SMOKE INHALATION

Explaining how it works, showing the importance of this is effectively done by looking at the photographs below.



Thankfully people don't often come across fire. You can see the devastation that it can cause. In the front of the picture are two doors – which are closed.



In this picture we can actually see where the fire started, and in a flat which didn't have a self-closer on the fire door. The fire was then able to spread. A self-closer would potentially have restricted the damage to the flat, rather than spreading through the corridor. As a fire-fighter, dealing with a fire in one room is far easier than fighting a fire from further away coming down the corridor.



This is an image of the flat opposite to the one above. Whilst it's clear to see the door which had a self-closer on it, and was closed, has sustained damage you can see the room inside is practically untouched.

Case study 2: The practicalities of managing an intrusive inspection

Adam Kiziak – Head Consultant – Fire, The Oakleaf Group
Dan Martin – Fire Consultant, The Oakleaf Group

As fire risk assessors, we're experienced at going into the resident's home to complete intrusive works and managing this process. The Oakleaf Group performs over 2,400 Fire Risk Assessments each year, and have been BAFE SP205 accredited since 2013. Spending time with residents during a FRA is an extremely valuable opportunity to learn as much as possible.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WE HAVE FACED?

- 1 Organisations with large and complex portfolios can sometimes fail to ensure that the information residents need - for example that an inspection is taking place today - has not reached them, including those who are managing multiple premises.
- 2 This restricts the amount of knowledge and information that can be obtained during an inspection, particularly if assessors cannot access residents' properties as required for a Type Four Fire Risk Assessment and Compartmentation Survey.
- 3 On occasions when residents refuse access, having a Property Manager accompany the Assessors is essential. If the resident hasn't read a letter advertising the visit the Property Manager can invariably explain the situation and assist the Assessor to proceed. If Assessors are not accompanied, the supply of identification badges issued by the Housing Association can provide reassurance to residents that the Assessors are approved and working directly for the Association.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

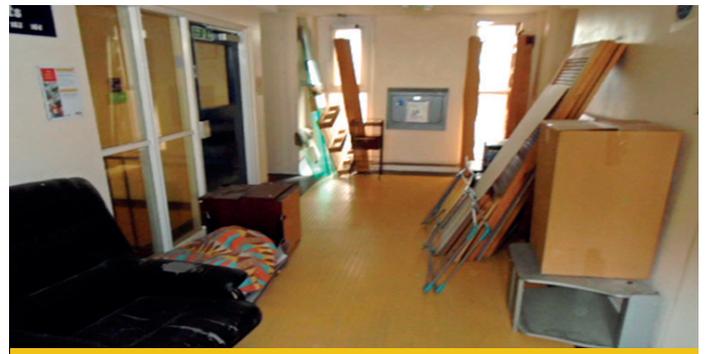
Residents do not always know who to contact to report safety issues in our experience. For example where detection is installed for the residents, the person installing the system should also be providing relevant guidance and information to the resident on how to test it and how to recognise a fault, and who to report it too. The support mechanism also needs to be supported appropriately within the organisation to avoid prolonged periods where no action is taken.

Residents often have a mixed understanding of evacuation procedures. Staying put is not realistic - for the moment - for the majority of residents in high rise buildings to adhere to. This lack of understanding or confusion can also be attributed to the way in which evacuation policies are displayed or communicated. The numbers of people and diversity of the population living in such accommodation must be considered so that information displayed can be understood more effectively.

Residents are still displaying a lack of regard for the safety of others, or their own safety. As the images below show an elderly lady, clearly living in difficult situation given her ability to cope, was using two temporary electric heaters to dry her laundry. In this instance the Type Four Fire Safety Assessment uncovered a situation of importance to Social Services and the landlord.

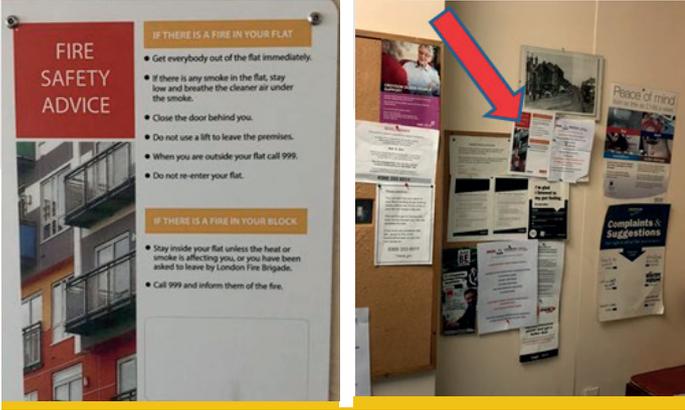


Third party contractors also have a responsibility to report what they see when they visit situations like this.



Here's an example of a resident's lack of knowledge of their own responsibilities to keep communal areas clear, or to have the confidence that if they report a situation to the landlord it will not be held against them.

COMMUNICATION OF FIRE SAFETY ADVICE: IS THIS APPROPRIATE FOR THOSE LIVING IN YOUR PREMISES?



Just because a notice has been pinned up on a noticeboard doesn't ensure all the residents will have read it, even assuming they've noticed it alongside all the other notices.

IN SUMMARY

- Review your FRAs and consider the need for a more intrusive survey, particularly if the full history of the building is not known or has recently been taken over.
- Provide sufficient and relevant resources to support assessors to limit delays and additional costs.
- Provide adaptive and effective channels of communication for residents and other relevant bodies.
- Encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practice with others to improve knowledge and support residents and responsible persons.

Case study 3: How to engage effectively with residents

Jon Wallis – Business Director for Refurbishment, United Living

As a housing regeneration provider specialising with residents in occupation, we provide bespoke resident liaison processes tailored to their individual needs. Our Resident Liaison teams are often the first and last point of contact for residents, maintaining contact throughout the journey.

We firmly believe that there is a need to meet the changing agenda for resident information in respect of building safety.

DELIVERING BESPOKE LIAISON

One of our current projects is reflective of the need for resident engagement – three High Rise Residential Buildings (HRRBs) with ACM cladding.

Prior to the project we;

- Agreed a Communication Plan.
- Held multiple 'Meet the Contractor' events.
- Conducted 1:1 profiling.
- Identified and planned for vulnerable residents.
- Sited the Resident Liaison Team at the heart of the community.
- Engaged with the Tenant Residents Associations (TRAs) and resident representatives.



Removal of the ACM cladding uncovered multiple breaches leading to:

- Intense collaboration with client.
- Destructive surveys.
- An evolved communication strategy.
- Management of resident expectations.

SO WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Residents are now intrinsic to the future solution.
- We've maintained the Resident Liaison Team throughout the process.
- We've regained trust through transparency and resident involvement.
- There's a one team approach with all stakeholders.
- We're educating for the future.

IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of the project we've identified the need to;

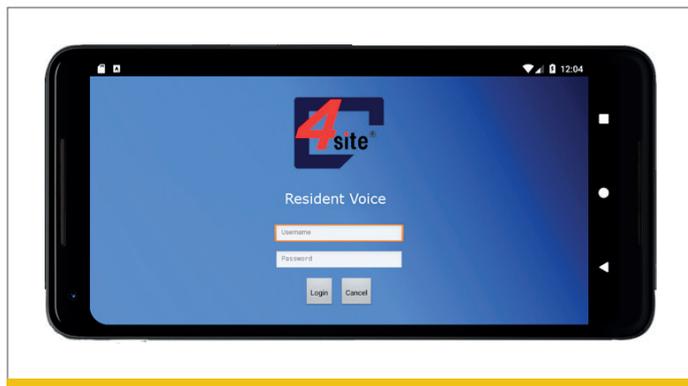
- Collaborate to change the status quo on communicating safety information - particularly in HRRBs.
- Embed policies and adapt to change.
- Reassure stakeholders of competency and product integrity.
- Work with Tenant Resident Associations before building work decisions are made.
- Communicate the role of residents in maintaining building safety.
- Ensure that we as contractors continue to evolve our processes to support dutyholders.
- Renew resident trust and confidence.

Case study 4: Making best use of technology to give residents a feedback loop

Dr Shaun Lundy – Technical Director, 4site Consulting

4site is a Health and Safety consultancy and in the property sector we do a lot of Fire Risk Assessments. We're mindful that our FRAs potentially will have a big impact on residents but we don't have regular engagement with them in the normal course of our work.

We appreciate therefore that closing that gap would be beneficial to all of us. Residents need to know what safe means and receive information from a Risk Assessor in a format that is palatable to them and easily understandable. That's why we're developing a new App for residents to positively engage with risk management and also provide a platform to educate and inform.



4site's Resident Voice app is currently under development, it will allow information to be communicated to residents but crucially will allow them to ask questions and give feedback to Managing Agents.

We spoke to residents, Managing Agents, and to our Risk Assessors and they came up with some suggestions regarding areas they felt would be useful to include in a app of this nature.



1 The need for **smoke detection, testing and maintenance** in the home



2 Potential **causes of fire** within a home, including seasonal causes and prevention



3 The importance of the **flat front door**, results of door inspections and guidance



4 Understanding the **evacuation strategy**, including consultation on the rationale



5 Education on keeping **common areas** and the means for **escape clear** with the facility to report issues



6 Giving residents the **opportunity to communicate** and engage through the system in a convenient and efficient manner

The idea will be that the resident will log into the app and get safety information that was relevant to their building and their flat. Following our consultation what became clear was the importance of being able to go beyond the flat front door. We recognise this is a challenge.

Also, understanding the importance of smoke detection and perhaps dealing with the causes of fire in a home were key issues to emerge from the consultation. Reinforcing what other speakers said today, a need to recognise the importance of the fire door itself is something we have also come across in our engagement with residents.

Another strong theme was the evacuation strategy, I've talked to residents who've told me 'we don't have an evacuation strategy. It is apparent that residents don't always fully understand that so there's an opportunity to educate and consult with residents on why a particular strategy exists and what strategies are.

Clearly giving residents information and the opportunity to comment on these issues through an app will help them to better understand the safety requirements of their building. Using technology is not the only solution, but given most people have smartphones it is certainly our belief that it will make a valuable contribution to improving consultation and general communication between residents and managing agents.

Meet the speakers



Mark Varley
**Group Head of
Health & Safety,
FirstPort**

Mark joined FirstPort in May 2014 as Group Head of Health and Safety. His previous roles include Head of Health and Safety for Metropolitan Housing and Care and Support, UK Health, Safety and Environment Manager for E.ON and Health and Safety Director for Associated Training and Consultancy.

Mark is a Chartered Member of the Institution of Safety and Health and a Member of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management with nearly 30 years' experience in health and safety and a Member of the Institute of Property Managers (IRPM).



Dame Judith Hackitt
**Chair of the
Independent Review
of Building Regulations
and Fire Safety**

Dame Judith was Chair of the Health and Safety Executive from October 2007 to March 2016. She previously served as a Health and Safety Commissioner between 2002 and 2005. She was made a Dame in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to health and safety and engineering, and in particular for being a role model for young women. She was awarded a CBE in 2006. In April 2016, she was appointed as Chair of EEF, The Manufacturers' Organisation.

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London in June 2017, Dame Judith was asked to chair the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety in relation to high rise buildings.



Nick Coombe
**Protection Vice Chair,
National Fire Chiefs
Council**

Nick's 37 years' service for the London Fire Brigade has spanned many roles including Inspecting Officer, Team leader, Head of Fire Safety Training, Enforcement Manager and Head of Fire Safety Policy.

He is currently NFCC Protection Vice Chair and lead on implementation of the Hackitt review and post Grenfell fall out. Nick is a member of the newly formed Industry Safety Steering Group led by Dame Judith Hackitt to hold industry to account on the progress of post Grenfell change. In January he was awarded an MBE for services to fire safety.



Andy Wright
**Primary Authority
Scheme Manager,
Cambridgeshire
Fire & Rescue**

Andy's role is to engage with Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue's partners to ensure they comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, giving guidance and advice where appropriate. He carries out a variety of audit types, from programmed to alleged fire risks and post fire audits, and also liaises with fire crews and partner agencies through the Safer Peterborough Partnership.

Andy attends and contributes to a number of Safety Advisory Groups and also liaises with local building control and approved inspectors on building control consultations.



Adam Kiziak
Head Consultant – Fire,
The Oakleaf Group

Adam has worked in the fire industry for over 15 years and is the Head Consultant for Fire at The Oakleaf Group, leading a team of 16 fire safety consultants, surveyors and assessors. He is responsible for their BAFE SP205 accreditation, which the company has held since 2013, and for ensuring all fire risk assessments are produced in line with the company quality procedures.

Adam sits on the board of the IFE fire risk assessor register, and has been a panel member since 2015. As part of this role he undertakes peer reviews and interviews of fire risk assessor competency, in line with the competency council standard, produced by the fire industry.



Dan Martin
Fire Consultant,
The Oakleaf Group

After a 19-year career in the fire service, Dan worked on large scale construction projects as a Health & Safety and fire consultant in London and the South West. In 2016. He joined Oakleaf as part of the management team.

Combining his experience and knowledge gained from both careers, Dan supports various clients during re-development and new build projects, including conducting fire risk assessments and compartmentation surveys for a broad spectrum of clients throughout the UK.



Jon Wallis
Business Director
for Refurbishment,
United Living

Jon joined United Living in 2016, bringing with him over 34 years' experience of working in the construction industry. Prior to this he worked in a large construction company progressing from an Operational role to Group Commercial Director working in both the Regeneration and Public Sector Refurbishment divisions.

Jon has excellent technical expertise and a vast knowledge of construction including high rise refurbishment, overseeing the delivery of a number of High Rise Block Refurbishment projects since joining United Living.



Dr Shaun Lundy
Technical Director,
4site Consulting

Shaun is a Chartered Safety and Health Practitioner and Chartered Building Engineer with over 25 years of experience. He leads a team of advisors and surveyors providing property and facility risk management services to the residential and commercial property sectors.

In addition to his day job as Technical Director at 4site, Shaun is a Visiting Scholar at the University of Greenwich, a member of the HSE's Myth Buster Challenge Panel, and a Member of the Policy and Standards Committee at the Institution of Occupational Safety & Health.

Like to learn more?

FirstPort is the UK's largest residential property manager, overseeing 185,000 homes in England, Wales and Scotland across over 3,900 developments. It is the market-leading operator, with four decades of experience and 3,000 employees working with developers, investors, freeholders and over 200 resident management companies.

If you would like to discuss the findings from this paper in more detail, please come and talk to us.



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Previous briefing papers in this series of events can be downloaded here:

[Harnessing Technology in Residential Property Management](#)

[Uncertainty and opportunity in the UK residential property market](#)

[Customer service excellence: Trust versus transaction](#)

[Delivering Build to Rent - Are you ready?](#)

[Delivering Build to Rent - Top ten questions answered](#)

[Perspectives on health and wellbeing from commercial and residential property](#)

[Retirement living considerations for the modern age](#)