



**South Region Virtual Forum Questions and Answers**

**Date: Tuesday 16 March 2021**

**Staff in attendance:**

- Debbie Smith, Regional Head of Housing
- Lauren Picton, Sustainment and Partnerships Manager
- Louisa Guest, Leasehold Manager
- Pippa Fleetwood-Read, Deputy Group Director of Commercial Services
- David McLean, Asset Lead – Repairs
- Andy Mackay, Building Safety Director
- Ollie Levy, Resident Involvement Manager (OL)

**Video link:** <https://youtu.be/TAjp03c1QFE>

**Questions and Answers:**

	<b>Question/Query</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Q1	Is the proposed framework across all NHG residences or for the new development of Peckham place? I live in the new Peckham development and we were previously advised there may be a new Fire Safety framework which we were invited to ask questions about. I submitted several questions and the answers were unhelpful and since then there has been no update to the residents.	Your observations in regard to the Section 20 element of the Landlord & Tenant Act (1985) have been taken into account. The Fire Safety Framework will be a panel of specialist consultants and surveys, that will be able to assist NHG in the management of all areas of Building Safety across our whole portfolio.
Q2	Looking at the questions, will another meeting be held to answer the pertinent questions surrounding cladding, EWS1 forms etc... and include covering buildings under 18m and not only concentrate on high rises as this impacts all blocks?	NHG has a wider programme of surveys and inspections of thousands of our buildings, in total we have more than 5,000 blocks of flats. At present we are prioritising blocks over 18m and blocks that have been highlighted based on our desktop review of height, material and other factors. It is important to highlight that EWS1 Certificates should only be required by lenders for buildings over 18 metres.
Q3	None of the recommendations from our fire risk assessment in 2019 seem to have been addressed - the rating was assessed as moderate harm to life in the event of a fire. Why have none of these recommendations been implemented? The deadline for this given in the assessment is a couple of months away. I have raised this with our property manager but have not received a response. Is this indicative of NHG's policy and response to fire risk assessments and safety?	Where NHG is the Responsible Person under the legislation, we have a rolling programme for undertaking FRA's with frequency based on risk. Once the assessment has been completed, all actions are allocated to be completed either by our own staff, or external contractors. The works may be completed at any time within the timescale identified and will be programmed in depending on the contractors' resource availability.

Q4	The EWS1s that have been issued, are these because the blocks are now exempt due to the governments most recent changes? How many blocks have actually had works done as a step towards their compulsory EWS1?	The EWS1 forms issued are not because blocks are exempt, they have been issued following a detailed review by an independent Fire Engineer. They are generally blocks that do not require any, or much, remedial works. We have completed works on a number of blocks which has allowed EWS1s to be issued.
Q5	What percentage of NHG buildings that have had EWS1 completed (your slide states 86 buildings in 2020) have passed at A1 or A2?	There are a small number of blocks that have been passed at A1 or A2 rating. The majority are B1s, acknowledging that blocks do have flammable materials on them, but in the fire engineers opinion, the risk of fire spread across the external walls is unlikely.
Q6	Why does NHG consistently fail to meet promised time frames on remediation projects in relation to EWS1? We were told we were lucky to have an early survey and yet are still waiting to find out if work is needed and when we will get the EWS certificate.	Please accept our apology for any delay. We intend to keep to the timescales set out. We are working hard to improve our resident communications going forward.
Q7	When do you intend to provide a comprehensive update on the advice note that was sent to leaseholders on fire safety and EWS1 in December, that takes into account the new RICS guidance issued last week?	We issue a general leaseholder update on all areas of Building Safety each quarter. The next issue, will have further details on our EWS1 programme.
Q8	Why are NHG taking so long to respond to confirm the materials that have been used in the construction of the external walls of your buildings? NOTE: I have spoken to leaseholders in seven different NHG buildings who have been asking for months and have not received a response	We are only able to confirm materials used, compliance with building regulations and related information, once we have completed intrusive surveys of specific buildings. In the event that we find issues, we will inform all residents of specific issues in each building as soon as possible.
Q9	Are repairs in communal areas on hold? They're not being done in my block.	No, communal repairs are being dealt with as normal. If you have something that has not been dealt with, please inform your housing officer.
Q10	Is there an intention to separate leaseholders and not have them managed by housing officers?	Where we have mixed tenure schemes, those with a mixture of leaseholders and tenants, we aim to manage these in a consistent way with a single point of contact whether this is a housing Officer or a Property management officer. The distinction as to who a scheme will be managed by is based on the percentage mix of tenure with Housing Officers taking the lead where leasehold homes are in a minority.
Q11	As a resident for 25 years, why are we not having bathroom/kitchen upgrade?	We do carry out an annual kitchen and bathroom replacement programme. You can refer your kitchen and bathroom to be assessed by contacting your housing officer.

Q12	<p>Re: Cladding. In our case NHG hold leases on a minority of the flats, with subleases to shared owners, and all the flats are managed by an independent managing agent. The agent commissioned an EWS1 report that indicated the need for remediation. Some residents have questioned the thoroughness of the report. Will NHG support and advise their tenants in this case? PMO tends to do little but forward information from the agents.</p>	<p>In these instances, we do seek advice from our Technical Team on the reports received by our Managing Agents. This ensures that we are raising the right questions so that we can advocate on behalf of our leaseholders. We do this to ensure we are in the best position to represent our leaseholders' interests.</p>
Q13	<p>Can you outline your policy on subletting if we are unable to sell our property? I understand it's case by case, but could you outline the scenarios where this might be permissible?</p>	<p>The officer responsible for managing the property is required to review and advise whether permission can be granted under the lease, the terms for permission being granted, or whether there is a need to withhold permission as per the conditions in the lease. In most circumstances, permission to sublet will only be granted for a fixed period of up to 12 months. This is the maximum duration of any agreement as stated in the procedure. There may be exceptional circumstances – such as where an EWS1 has not been provided or necessary Building Safety works prevent a sale – in which permission to sublet can be considered for a longer period up to 2 years and extended further if necessary following a further request. In such circumstances, the officer responsible will discuss this with their manager.</p>
Q14	<p>How are you informing your property managers about EWS1 and the associated issues? I asked my property manager about it and she incorrectly told me the government were funding 'everything' (they aren't as we are under 18m). They also asked me 'what is a waking watch'. It doesn't fill me with confidence that the PMO has any idea of what leaseholders are facing?</p>	<p>Our Property Managers are provided with advice and information based on NHG's works to successfully gain an EWS1 on our buildings. Our Property Managers discuss the importance of this and the laws governing us in regular team meetings in addition to items of further reading.</p>
Q15	<p>I completed on my shared ownership property in August 2020 - no one in the resale team at NHG advised that the building had any cladding. Why not? I found out when informed by my property manager about 6 weeks ago. Is it NHG's policy not to inform new buyers of any cladding issues?</p>	<p>Unfortunately, we do not know the details surrounding the sale of your home. We would like to recommend you contact your Property Management Officer to discuss this further.</p>

Q16	<p>On your 'Good News Stories' slide, you state that EWS1 been gained on some of your lower blocks. How is this possible when we have been told consistently that high rise buildings are being prioritised? I am in a 2 - 3 storey build and have been informed that we are not due to be assessed for an EWS1 until at least '2022-23', because higher rise buildings are being prioritised.</p>	<p>NHG have and continue to prioritise our buildings which measure 18m+. Where we have successfully gained an EWS1 on our buildings which measure less than 18m, this has been a result of a non-intrusive survey, which we were fortunate enough to be in a position to undertake. This is in essence a visual survey of the building.</p>
Q17	<p>What are you doing to support your leaseholders who are caught up in the cladding scandal and how do you intend to improve this going forwards?</p>	<p>There are several steps we have taken to help our Leaseholders during this difficult time as best we can. We have implemented a fixed-term subletting procedure, we have paused the management of our arrears cases for those who have been financially affected by Covid-19. In addition to this, we have also taken on the costs of Waking Watch. Where necessary NHG are actively in discussions with our Developers and encourage our leaseholders' MPs to advocate on our leaseholder behalf.</p>
Q18	<p>Why are you not offering buyback for your shared ownership properties?</p>	<p>We sympathise with the position that many leaseholders are in due to the requirements for EWS1 forms to be provided to facilitate financial transactions, but we are unable to offer to buy back the homes of affected residents. As a provider of social and affordable housing every pound we make is spend on building new homes for those who need them, managing existing tenancies and providing resident support services. We are regulated to ensure we fulfil that brief as best we can.</p> <p>As a sector we are lobbying the government for a transitional arrangement that supports normal lending while building requirements are met, which will give leaseholders greater peace of mind whatever their current or future plans. Our sector is also lobbying government to ensure leaseholders do not have to pay the costs of remediation.</p> <p>We are aware that Notting Hill Genesis was mentioned in a recent episode of You and Yours on Radio 4 with regards to buying back properties, but this was in reference to a development where a specific building safety issue was raised by our fire experts that required us to move all residents off-site immediately. Until a full survey is carried out we do not know when or if the development will reopen, so in that instance we have offered to buy back homes for the benefit of all involved. We have no expectation of this sort of issue being repeated elsewhere so a similar buyback</p>

		process is very unlikely.
Q19	My housing officer does not respond to any of my emails or calls. My block has not been cleaned since before December 2020, but we are still being charged - who do we now contact to complain?	If you have not received a response from your Housing officer this can be escalated through their manager who will address this with them. If you provide specific details of your block we will be able to follow up on your complaint. As we move out of the national lockdown our Housing Officers will be spending more time out on individual estates and will directly address any issues identified.