

Fire and Smoke Alarms in Scottish Homes

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Noting

1 Recommendations

Council is recommended to note this report, advising that Scotland has become the first UK nation to legally require every home to have interlinked smoke alarms. Changes are being made to the Housing (Scotland) Act to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the same level of protection whether they own or rent their home.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The legislation was introduced in 2019 following the Grenfell Tower fire disaster in London, but was delayed until 2022 due to the coronavirus pandemic. These rigorous standards have previously applied to new-build and private rented housing but from 1 February, 2022 the legislation will apply to all property owners, including those who own private homes. It will be the property owner's responsibility to pay for and install the alarms.

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3 Background

Changes to the Housing (Scotland) Act are being made in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire in which 71 people died.

The Scottish government gave the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service £1m to install the alarms in the homes of people assessed to be at high risk from fire. The government has also provided £500,000 to help disabled and older people meet the criteria.

All alarms should be ceiling mounted and interlinked. Interlinked alarms are connected so when one goes off they all go off, alerting people wherever they are in a house. The alarms can be interlinked by radio frequency. Every home must have the following:

- one smoke alarm installed in the room most frequently used for general daytime living purposes
- one smoke alarm in every circulation space on each storey, such as hallways and landings
- one heat alarm installed in every kitchen.

Where there is a carbon-fuelled appliance (such as boilers, fires - including open fires - and heaters) or a flue, a carbon monoxide detector is also required. This does not need to be linked to the fire alarms.

It is estimated that for an average three-bedroom house, which requires three smoke alarms, one heat alarm and one carbon monoxide detector, will be about £220.

This is based on using alarms that can be installed without the need for an electrician. These must be tamper-proof, long-life lithium battery alarms.

However, there are also alarms that can be connected to the mains which are cheaper but have to be installed by a qualified electrician which will incur an additional cost. Alarms that are connected to the mains need to be fitted by a qualified electrician.

Different home insurance policies provided by different insurers will have varying terms and conditions which a homeowner must comply with in order for their home insurance to be valid.

Homeowners should contact their home insurer to check whether the new requirements will be specifically included in their policy.

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

4.1 Resource

There are no Council resource implications related to this report. The Council's obligations as a landlord to have installed the fire and smoke alarm devices are met. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has already received £1m from Scottish Government to install alarms in homes of people at highest risk and the government has also provided £500,000 to help disabled and older people meet the criteria, with an extra allocation awarded prior to the regulations commencing from 1 February to Care and Repair Scotland, which intends to target some of this additional funding to Council areas that do not have a Care and Repair service.

There is not an established Care & Repair Service in Midlothian, although funding was previously provided to support a local enterprise to deliver these, however, that proved unsustainable and the service subsequently closed.

[News | Care and Repair Scotland](#)

4.2 Digital

There are no digital implications related to this report.

4.3 Risk

The legislation means that every home in Scotland must have interlinked fire alarms by February 2020. It will not be a criminal offence not to have the alarms fitted. Local authorities are officially responsible for enforcing the legislation but they will not be going into peoples' homes to inspect them and will not be issuing fines.

Any enforcement of the legislation sits with local authorities and this would be pursued through our Protective Services. The Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) requirements are not affected and Fire Service and Environmental Health Service inspections continue for those as previously.

However, Scottish Government have made clear prior to the enactment that there is no expectation of councils pursuing enforcement at this time for domestic properties.

The Scottish Government has indicated that councils could require homeowners to carry out work, but it did not expect them to go beyond advising property owners about fire alarms.

The government will use statistics from the Scottish House Condition Survey to assess overall compliance at a local authority level. Compliance will also form part of any Home Report when homes are put on the market.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities

The requirement is to have all alarms interlinked so people in the house will be alerted immediately.

4.5 Additional Report Implications

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Not applicable

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- ☐ Holistic Working
- ☐ Modern
- ☐ Sustainable
- ☐ Transformational
- ☐ Preventative
- ☐ Asset-based
- ☐ Continuous Improvement

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- ☐ One Council Working with you, for you
- ☐ Preventative and Sustainable
- ☐ Efficient and Modern
- ☐ Innovative and Ambitious

A.4 Delivering Best Value

There are no direct implications related to this report.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Not applicable

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Not applicable

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

As a council we are encouraging householders to install the alarms to help save lives, we will not be penalising anyone who needs more time to comply with the new rules. Our approach, which takes into account people's individual circumstances and the pressure of the pandemic, is in line with the views of the Scottish Government and the umbrella organisation representation local councils across Scotland, CoSLA.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable

APPENDIX 1

Scottish Fire & Rescue Service Briefing Note.