

Fire safety in refurbished buildings

AUDIT TOOL



West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service is concerned about the arrangements in place for protecting the fire safety precautions of a building, especially if it has been refurbished or if any modification or maintenance projects have been carried out. In the Service's experience, buildings can and do become compromised in fire safety terms by works carried out. These works can be high or poor quality; they might be carried out for very desirable reasons; but sometimes many different types of works can unintentionally damage the fire safety arrangements of a building. Even something as simple as repainting a surface can be significant.



West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service believes that organisations should have policies in place that focus on the effectiveness of fire safety protection arrangements. Policies provide clarity for all about what is expected. Organisations should also have in place processes that prevent unintended fire safety breaches or damage.

This audit tool has been designed to assist organisations to consider their arrangements. In the first part, the audit tool suggests questions that those responsible for the governance and policies of an organisation should ask.

For officers with housing management or technical responsibilities, the audit tool is intended to provoke focus on whether the plans for individual projects have properly taken into account fire safety considerations.



The audit tool has three parts

1. A short set of questions for those with governance responsibilities, especially councillors. In general, councillors do not simply make assumptions about how the services which they govern are being planned and delivered. Councillors ask questions about policies; processes and delivery on the ground. West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service wants councillors to apply that same discipline to fire safety.
2. The second section focuses on cross-disciplinary working to establish that the appropriate professional disciplines have been involved in planning for projects. It can be used to examine the policy of arrangements, or it can be applied to individual projects
3. The third section is concerned with whether the different elements of specific projects were executed with fire safety in mind.

The answers to these questions should highlight any fire safety management issues that may need to be addressed. The audit tool also contains a risk rating matrix which will help identify recommended actions.

Details of specific refurbishment, modification or piece of maintenance work

Address

Name of auditor

Job title of auditor

Date of audit

Section one

This part of the audit tool is focussed on whether your organisation has exercised any policy governance around fire safety management. It is designed for local authorities, but could equally be applied to other bodies. Councillors could ask officers to prepare a report addressing these issues.

- 1.1** Does the district or borough have clear policies stating that before any refurbishments, modifications or maintenance works are carried out in, particularly in housing stock, there must be proper assessment of the impact on fire safety?

Yes No Please provide any supporting details below.

- 1.2** Does the district or borough have clear policies stating that all refurbishments, modifications or maintenance works will result in buildings which are equally or more fire safety compliant than they were before the works?

Yes No Please provide any supporting details below.

- 1.3** Does the district or borough have clear policies stating that once refurbishments, modifications or maintenance works are complete, councillors will receive confirmation that the building will meet all necessary fire safety requirements?

Yes No Please provide any supporting details below.

Section two

This part of the audit tool is focussed on whether there has been effective multi-disciplinary working and that the appropriate professional disciplines have been involved in the planning for works. The questions could be applied to individual projects, or they could be addressed as wider policy issues. Some of the questions may be thought to overlap. However, this also has the effect of verifying the prior answers.

2.1 When refurbishments and improvement projects are planned, describe the arrangements that are in place for ensuring appropriate consultation across relevant departments and disciplines (whether provided by in-house staff or external suppliers).

2.2 Does the authority have clear arrangements for determining when building control consent is required; or, if this audit is in respect of an individual policy, was building control consent sought for the work?

Yes No

If not, how was it established that it was not required and is there a record of that consideration?

2.3 Which officer applied for building control consent?

2.4 What were the arrangements to consult West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) on any works that could impact on the fire precautions of the building (including those works that do not require a statutory consultation to WSFRS)?

If WSFRS provided advice, is there evidence that the advice given was acted upon and how is this recorded?

Section three

This part of the audit tool looks at whether the different elements of a specific refurbishment, modification or piece of maintenance work were executed with fire safety in mind. It is recommended that the questions in this section are applied to individual projects. They will help to test whether your policies and processes work in practice.

3.1 Before carrying out the project, what assessment was made of the impact of these works on the fire precautions of the premises?

3.2 Was any consideration given to consulting West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service about any impact on firefighting operations (including during the works stage)?

3.3 Is the name of the person making the assessment recorded and what assessment was made that they are suitably qualified to have made such an assessment?

3.4 How did officers guard generally against improvements which could compromise the fire safety features of the building?

3.5 Specifically, how did officers guard against individual design failures?

Section three continued

3.6 How did officers guard against accumulated actions which might produce fire safety failures?

3.7 How did officers guard against the use of incorrect materials?

3.8 How did officers ensure that all installers and products were third party approved?

3.9 How did officers ensure that no materials that might contribute to a fire were used?

3.10 Did officers consider whether the project also provided an opportunity to examine fire stopping and compartmentation in the building?

Section three continued

3.11 How did officers ensure that the persons contracted to carry out such works were suitably competent?

Did you apply the same consideration to any sub-contractors?

3.12 In planning the project, do you know whether the Fire Protection Association's Design Guide for the Fire Protection of Buildings (or any other similar guidance) was used?

3.13 When the project was complete, was a (new) fire risk assessment undertaken?

3.14 Can officers confirm that the completion of the project resulted in a building that is equally or more fire safety compliant than they were before the works?

Yes No Please provide any supporting details below.

If the answer to any of these questions is that there are no such policies in place, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service recommends that the Authority should promptly address the matter.

Further information for councillors

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service has a further guide for councillors on fire safety which can provide more information on this topic:

- Councillor guide on fire safety for use during council meetings

Audit summary Conclusion including overall risk rating (see matrix below)

Risk rating matrix Auditor to identify overall risk rating of project

Risk	Criteria	Recommendation
High	<p>Weaknesses in or lack of policy and procedures and evidence that fire safety breaches could occur through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consultation with other stakeholders. • Lack of appropriate inspections. • Lack of training/ understanding/ briefing about the existing fire safety arrangements in the building by contractors, staff, subcontractors. • Lack of sufficient management control of contractors, staff, subcontractors. • Compensatory fire prevention and protection measures not incorporated to maintain general fire precautions during works affecting existing measures. 	<p>Full review of projects and decision on suitability of existing processes to control/inspect projects during refurbishment phase.</p> <p>Review risk assessment and significant processes and ensure competent persons carry out any of the preventive and protective measures needed.</p> <p>Ensure all significant findings are identified, recorded and addressed.</p>
Medium	<p>Evidence of policies and procedures in place but some indication that processes are not followed correctly. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consultation. • FRA not reviewed. • Lack of appropriate inspections. • Competency of contractors. 	<p>Review governance of projects and levels of responsibility in decision making.</p> <p>Review risk assessment and significant processes and ensure competent persons carry out any of the preventive and protective measures needed.</p> <p>Ensure all significant findings are identified, recorded and addressed.</p>
Low	<p>There are sound policy and inspection arrangements in place and evidence that all critical elements of the general and structural fire precautions are maintained during and after the refurbishment</p>	<p>Maintain and review.</p>

