

ALL- PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP



Chairman: Bob Blackman MP

Co Vice Chairs: Mary Glendon MP - Baroness Brinton – Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Rt. Hon. Sir George Howarth MP – Dr Kieran Mullan MP – Andy Slaughter MP

Rt. Hon. Sir Desmond Swayne MP – Lord Hendy KC - Robbie Moore MP

Secretary: Rt. Hon. Sir Mike Penning MP Treasurer: Peter Aldous MP

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ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP
BUSINESS MEETING - DATE AND VENUE: 5th SEPTEMBER 2023

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT WESTMINSTER

(Lords Committee Room “G”)

MEETING WITH PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE SCHOOLS SYSTEM – DfE - BARONESS BARRAN

At 11am to 11.30m

MINUTES

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence – personal matters

In attendance:

Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Bottomley MP – Co Vice Chair

Rt. Hon. Sir Desmond Swayne MP - Co Vice Chair

Lord John Hendy KC - Co Vice Chair

Lord Goddard of Stockport

Lord Knight of Weymouth

Hannah Bardell MP

Bob Blackman MP – Chairman – (represented by Harriet Shoosmith)

DfE Minister Baroness Barran

Two DfE Officials (names and titles to follow)

Ronnie King – APPG Fire Adviser/Hon. Admin Sec

Brian Robinson – APPG Fire Adviser
Tom Roche – APPG Adviser – Fire Sector Federation Board
Jane Duncan – APPG Adviser/RIBA Expert Fire Group.
Tilden Watson – Head of Education Zurich Municipal Insurance
Jim Clark – Public Affairs Manager Zurich Municipal Insurance
Jonathan Dyson – National Fire Chiefs Council – Lead Officer and Chief Fire Officer – North Yorkshire
Richard Clark – National Fire Chiefs Council - Senior Fire Engineer
Alasdair Parry – BAFSA Chief Executive
Ruth Oliver – REO Consultancy & BAFSA Skills
Ben Selby – Asst. Gen. Sec. Fire Brigades Union
Riccardo la Torre – National Officer – Fire Brigades Union
Tillie Muir – Political Liaison – Fire Brigades Union
Youssef Cockbaine - Public Affairs Manager – London Fire Brigade.
Nell Brown – RIBA Policy Team

Apologies

Mary Glendon MP – Co Vice Chair
Baroness Brinton – Co Vice Chair
Peter Aldous MP Treasurer
Dr Kieran Mullan MP – Co Vice Chair
Rt. Hon. Sir George Howarth MP – Co Vice Chair
Robbie Moore MP – Co Vice Chair
Mary Foy MP
Mick Whitley MP
Kim Johnson MP
Kim Leadbeater MP
Royston Smith MP
Jim Shannon MP
Hilary Benn MP
Andrew Lewer MP
Adam Holloway MP
Lord Kennedy of Southwark
Baroness Grey-Thompson
Lord Foster of Bath
Jonathan Gullis MP
Sir Bob Neil MP

Jill Mortimer MP
Nick Fletcher MP
Baroness Young of Old Scone
Baroness Bennett
Baroness Eaton
Marsha Decordova MP
Florence Eshalomi MP
Andrew Selous MP
Fleur Anderson MP
Daisy Cooper MP
Caroline Johnson MP
Heather Wheeler MP
Caroline Ansell MP
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Shabana Mahmood MP
Neil Coyle MP
James Sunderland MP
Abena Oppongasare MP.
Thangam Debbonaire MP
Julian Lewis MP
Mike Amesbury MP
Margaret Greenwood MP
Theo Clarke MP
Kate Kniveton MP
Christine Jardine MP
Andrew Rosindell MP
Layla Moran MP
Rachael Maskell MP
Yasmin Qureshi MP
Shabana Mahmood MP
Feryal Clark MP
Meg Hillier MP
Ian Mearns MP
Jack Brereton MP
Alex Sobel MP
Adam Holloway MP

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: Suggested to the Minister that in view of her very restricted timescale, we should start the meeting with Lord Goddard in the Chair pending imminent arrival of the Chairman and a number of Members of Parliament and Peers. He asked if the Minister would like to speak first?

Baroness Barran: “Well, I think the only thing I wanted to say initially was just to really apologise about not being able to stay with you for an hour and I'm more than happy to put in a follow up meeting at your convenience. It's just that with our announcement about reinforced concrete in schools, we're just absolutely ‘flat to the board’ so, just let me know and if we can't cover everything today, I will put something in next week or whenever it works for you. But it's just that these few days are particularly rushed”.

Lord Goddard: Asked Ronnie King to summarise the issues which are of concern to the Group given his close involvement with Schools Fire Safety and the Department for Education’s Fire Safety Design Guide for New Schools (Building Bulletin 100) over the past sixteen years.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec, Ronnie King:

“Minister and APPG Members, firstly before asking other professionals and members to comment, I should mention that the Group is most dissatisfied with both the process followed in the review of Building Bulletin 100 “Fire Safety Design Guide for new Schools” and with the outcome reached by way of decisions.

I was a member of the Stakeholder Group between 2019 and 2021, as I had been in 2007. In relation to 2019/21 Stakeholder Group, there were issues about receiving minutes/notes following those three meetings, which on one occasion I recall took over six months to receive; and then only received because we asked for them. The Stakeholder Group were not told what was going to be recommended in the revised Fire Safety Design Guide until just before the Public consultation was released in May 2021. We were told that we would be first to see it, but that it couldn’t be changed before going out for consultation.

Once we realised what the Revised Document was proposing, it was clearly not going to be acceptable to the whole Fire Sector. There had been no Regulatory Impact Assessment normally found in other Government

consultations e.g such as the effect of fires on pupils' attainment levels; and whilst it might not be a statutory document, it was said to be the only route to compliance once approved.

The second major omission was that there was no limit on the size of a compartment for a single storey school built without automatic fire sprinkler protection. (which meant a new single storey school built could be several acres in size without fire suppression)!!

The consultation has been out now for two years having been released in May 21 and it closed in August 2021.

“That's over two years ago and we haven't yet seen the results of the consultation)! We know what the fire sector said because the whole of the fire sector rejected the consultation. (evidenced by the 25 signatures contained in the OPEN letter dated 17th August 2021 to former Secretary of State, the Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson CBE MP). I am pleased that Lord Knight is here because in 2007 Lord Knight introduced the current Fire Safety Design Guide for new schools (Building Bulletin 100). It was focussed on the impact that this has on education. And its message was that sprinklers will be expected to be installed in all new schools except for a very few, low risk schools and that was a great achievement having been demanded by the, then leader of the opposition party, Sir Michael Howard KC. MP, now Lord Howard of Lympne, following the school fire in his constituency where the children were frightened, screaming and running out of the building.”

Sir Michael Howard asked: “what are you going to do about this”? And Schools Minister Knight said that he would do exactly what's necessary. “You want sprinklers into schools? I'm not going to require them by law, but I will lower the legal requirement to one of an EXPECTATION.” In the beginning, we saw more than 75% of school's sprinklered, which continued for many months, almost two years of school's complying. It was going really well until slowly people were beginning to seek loopholes (we similarly had this 'race to the bottom' prior to Grenfell). The loopholes being that as Building Bulletin 100 wasn't a statutory requirement, and only a “deemed to satisfy” provision, then new school providers didn't have to install automatic sprinkler protection if it could be achieved through an alternative approach, where it doesn't have to be compliant because it's not law. The Education Department was permitting this alternative route which avoided putting sprinklers into new schools. So, we really have had a problem over a long

time. BUT NOW this revision of the Fire Safety Design Guidance has been a COMPLETE REVERSAL, because the proposed new Guidance has moved to ONLY A FEW HIGH RISK SCHOOLS (as deemed by DfE's criteria) will be sprinkler protected!! and there's a lot of fire people in this room who without question disagree with this decision and proposed change.

It's the children's education, it's a school, a Community ASSET and we are only talking about new schools and not the 69,000 buildings DfE uses to inflate the RARITY perception, rather than the 22,000 actual schools. It was noted that in relation to the RAAC concrete issue, DfE reverts to the number of schools because that keeps the numbers lower. So there's a lot of unrest in the way that all this is being presented. Trends and Statistics in school fires can change so quickly from year to year, as the COVID period clearly indicates in the prevalence of fires. So we shouldn't allow a distortion to be used as a basis for making a policy on such a huge investment which can impact on our children's future Education, when we have evidence to justify protecting that investment.

The Group would really want to work with you Minister, we want to work with the Department, but we do want some changes to this building Bulletin 100. In line with what exists currently; and Lord Knight, you might just want to Say a few words”.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: “We are really glad you are here Minister. Before I was a Minister, I was patron of the National fire sprinkler Network. So I came into this and I heard the stories of primary school kids being led down corridors of burning coats as corridors were being used to hang coats. And one of them caught fire. And the numbers of school fires caused by arson being on the increase, the level of risk the difficulty of insurable risk, and a lot of local authorities self-insuring, disruption caused by a fire in a secondary school in a neighbouring constituency in Dorset. So I came into the post wanting to do this. Officials always hated it and never wanted to do it. The cost of sprinklers were about the same as carpets. They allow a design freedom in how you then design schools because you don't need as many passive measures, because you've got the active measure of the fire sprinkler in place, and also it felt like a potential win to free up some timely thinking away from some of the heavier passive measures like fire doors, which is still necessary, but not to the same extent. So, I was very, very keen and obviously I had pressure from Michael Howard, which was significant at the time, and I

was really hopeful that we would then see it only in highly exceptional circumstances schools being built without sprinklers. And I still passionately believe it's the right thing to do. You can't build a hotel, you can't build a large retail process unit, there is a whole bunch of sorts of buildings you can't have without sprinklers and this week is as good a week as any to talk about children's safety not being 'up for grabs', and we know that that's everyone's view in the room and I just worry that this is the wrong judgement informed by a mindset around costs, which has just got the risk analysis wrong".

DfE Minister Barran: "Thank you very much – I don't know if anyone else wants to add anything"?

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec, Ronnie King: "Before anyone else responds, with the Chairman's approval can I just ask quickly for comments from Tom Roach, who's another Advisor to the APPG, then from Jonathan Dyson, from North Yorkshire, who is the lead on this subject for the National Fire Chiefs Council and he's the Chief Fire Officer of North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service and then from Tilden Watson, Head of Education for Zurich Insurance? So firstly I'll ask Tom Roach to speak and ask him to be brief because the clocks ticking".

Tom Roche APPG Adviser and Fire Sector Federation Board: "I'm a Policy Director for the Fire Sector Federation. I Didn't agree with the consultation. In fact let's make this more personal, I can talk about statistics and numbers, but as a teenage boy a large part of my school burnt down. It wasn't the whole school, it was just part of the school but as a young science enthusiast, I watched all the science labs burn down and all the craft labs burn down. And we weren't so good at health and safety back in those days. So I was one of the older boys assigned to go back into the damaged school, to salvage".

"My abiding memory of that fire is watching a senior teacher in tears. In tears, because 19 years of their life had just gone up in smoke. I then spent two more years at that school. It seemed like fun at first, rushing backwards and forwards between different areas of the building. I can't tell you what the impact of that was on my education, I don't know. But every time I see a large fire, I still remember that teacher. I keep seeing that story repeated every time we have a large fire. And we keep using statistics and numbers, and I keep thinking it's impact. Kids are out of school, parents are disrupted. We don't know what the long term impacts of that, but somebody keeps telling me fires are rare and yet half of this same school is now a housing estate. But

the part that remains, it's had two fires since then, so fire is really rare? I'm struggling, I'm really struggling, but on a very personal level, it's that impact that's doesn't seem to be anywhere in the thinking and I find that incredible, truly, truly incredible. And each time we have one of these fires and we've had this at the APPG where we invite senior school leaders in to talk about fires, they tell exactly that story and I have that flashback back to that senior school leader. Absolutely in tears. And it's not to do with money. It's to do with the kids to do with what they've lost. Just gone and it won't be recovered and that will have an impact. And it has a 1000 kids in that school”.

“When I was a teenager. Admittedly, I'm a lot older now, but 40 years, I'm still having those flashbacks. I'll leave it there. That's my point on the fire. You know, we can talk about statistics as much as you like, but please - Think about the impact it's having on the kids, but particularly on the teachers. I would say that with a daughter that's going into a school this morning that's not doing so well.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec, Ronnie King: “I have begun to circulate to all APPG members, every school fire that occurs including last week's Greater Manchester large school fire in Bolton, which was another example; and there was one in Hartlepool the day before and that was primary school which affected the classrooms with smoke spread as well as the fire This also impacted on the education of the children. I will now bring in Johnathan Dyson, who is National Fire Chiefs Council's Lead on Automatic Water Suppression Systems, and also Chief Fire Officer North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service”.

Johnathan Dyson NFCC Lead and CFO N Yorks Fire & Rescue Service: “Thank you for the opportunity. I also experienced this loss to losing all of our GCSE work from a school building that burnt down, which is another core driver in all of this, because we are looking around with the life safety list, but it's the building safety and of course the community impact, and I share Tom's perspective when we talk around our new and this arises an opportune time as we're releasing our revised position statement on water sprinklers. Now, this is in light of the change that the government has made, but that position statement focuses upon the fact of the community impact that we have because it isn't just the school itself. It's often used on wider community events and it's the loss to the community as an entity. Now - and again when we look at statistics there, we do have, and we acknowledge that there is at

least one fire we've experienced between 2022 and 2023 – one fire every day in educational buildings. So, whilst you see it to be a rarity there is a continuing impact not only on the fire service, but of course the students. Now the original BB 100 spoke of sprinklers protecting the fabric of the school as well of life safety. A key point there was that it stated also was a weapon against arson. Of course many large school fires occur as a result of arson and whilst fire services are still able to respond and will respond. My own service is largely rural. Our travel times can be extensive. Of course that plays into the severity of the fire - where sprinklers can catch that immediately, often, as we saw it in Nottinghamshire, capture it and hold to within forty five metres square damage as we saw in Bolton. And from our perspective, it was the BB100 of course for us was a step forward. It was the strengthening of the position and our voice for sprinklers.

We find it currently, that government data says only 8.5% of new schools since 2015 have been fitted with sprinklers. So we find it quite a difficult message to accept that this will now be a worsening of BB100 and the guidance that we wouldn't strengthen this position as we're seeing with RAAC at the moment, the mitigation effects of that sprinklers are the key mitigating effect when those buildings are not occupied or they're able to capture it before the fire service attends, notwithstanding that, of course, is a petition that you may not need to evacuate and you may not have the community or the personal impact on schools or anybody else within there. We've seen a significant increase from our perspective and when we do our community work and we do our building inspections and of course, following Grenfell we did a significant step through the National Chiefs Council on the way we did within risk in buildings, but within the same period we conducted all the services we looked over 1500 school inspections, of which they were all bar 21 were found to have some issues and two were served with prohibition notices. So whilst we are looking at again the safety of the children it's the buildings themselves which pose the risk within that context, so the viability of those buildings are made more viable or more safe in that context because of the sprinklers and our voice, that message, it's quite simple that we would all we wanted mandated strengthening each other way we can do. But we mustn't see the lessening of the BB100 and the Removal of the risk assessment. Thank you”.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: “And lastly before Sir Peter, I'd be glad to introduce Tilden Watson, who's the educational lead on sprinklers for Zurich insurance”

Tilden Watson – Education Lead – Zurich Insurance: “I'm considerate of time so I'll just give a very brief kind of insurance company perspective on sprinklers. Our view is, fire is still probably the biggest threat that schools face. If you exclude the COVID years, you're still looking at between 500 and 700 fires a year and sometimes the difference between a small fire and a large fire is down to a number of things. It could be LUCK. It could be how far away is the fire brigade. It can be the weather on the day, It can be a whole number of the factors there. I think, we have never said this is a cost neutral argument. Sprinklers do cost money, but you've heard about the kind of non financial impacts education, a lot of these are community assets. We visit schools after the fires and see the trauma that you talk about, Tom. It's real and it's massive”.

“There's also the environmental impact of fire as well that that we see. Let's give a little bit about the data that we hold and that we have been sharing with the DFE and I'll just put that offer on the table to share again the data we have. We have a number of sources of data. Firstly, we survey a lot of the schools we insure. And what we see gives us quite a good insight on Fire Protection at schools have and this tells us quite a stark message that only 5% of schools in England have fire protection, whereas in Scotland we're seeing a kind of divergent gap where about 30% of the schools we survey have that kind of fire protection afforded to them, and that is growing, year by year”.

“The other set of data we have is around claims. We now don't hold the largest batch of claims records in that the DFE themselves do this through the RPA because you now insure over 9000 schools, but our part of the jigsaw tells us a number of things. One is if you look over the period of nine years up to 2021 when we last ran the data, we nearly had £100 million worth of claims that we paid out. Yet every year we have examples where sprinklers have saved us schools, so the bill would have been a lot higher, so we could even save part of that bill. You start recouping your investment. Large claims are quite frequent. Fire claims are volatile in the nature, so sometimes you do get away with it where the costs are pretty minimal with people on site, but if there's no one on site, there's no one to respond quickly, you can easily see our average large claims easily between 3 million and 20 million pounds”.

“Some of those can be avoided by sprinklers. The final area, so putting to one side the survey data which gives a good insight and the claims data which you know tells us the true financial costs and bearing in mind that this is also like the non-financial costs. We're recently doing a lot of work with what we call big data. OK, so we're looking at public records of fire losses matching those to types of buildings. So we can take all the fires, plot them against the public buildings and also plot them against public data that's available. So buildings that will have safe food hygiene certificates which tells us that they have kitchens. What this tells us is schools have nearly twice or 1.7 times higher likelihood of fire than other non residential buildings. That is quite a stark difference. So in light of that, it is another strong argument, where schools need greater protection than other types of organisations. I'll leave it there, but just to reiterate and offer from us at Zurich to work with your department around this and to share data”.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: “Thank you Tilden. Just a reminder, Sir Peter is going, I'm going to make a point. But just to remind everyone that we're only talking about new schools in the future. Get them right from now, but not for the existing 69,000 buildings, or 22,000 schools in England. Wales and Scotland have done it, so can't we just do it on new schools and then we are going somewhere for the future with protecting the asset? We are then not putting a wonderful asset there, only to burn it down. That's all we're asking for”.

The reality is that present Fire Safety Guidance states that ALL New schools will be sprinkler protected except for a few low risk schools whereas the DfE proposals are a complete reversal of this – whereby All new schools will then NOT be sprinkler- protected except for the FEW Schools built over 11 mtrs – SEN schools and the sleeping section only of Boarding schools!!

Rt. Hon.Sir Peter Bottomley MP: “I’m glad to follow Zurich because I sent to your private secretary the release as put out by Zurich three years ago - Talking about the over 200 fires a year Secondary schools, and over 200 primary schools. We know from past history that schools are one of the places where ARSON is more common than other buildings. And unless anyone can show a guaranteed cost benefit analysis it is better to rebuild whole schools, better to take all the costs that people talk about, some of them non financial. You build it in rather than bolt it on. As Nick Ross has said about residential buildings, there are no examples of people dying in

residential buildings where there are sprinklers. If they work in residential situations they should work in school buildings. And I think that, if government are being advised by people who say it's not necessary, ask those people to come and attend a meeting like this. We'll have a full professional discussion with them and we will be able to report back to you on what we agree on and what we disagree on.

Baroness Barran: “OK, so I will try and respond to some of that, but I think the main thing that's important for you to hear from me is that I have heard the level of your concern. I've heard the specificity of the ‘ask’ in relation to new schools and I will take it back and go around the loop one more time with colleagues to make sure that we're looking at the most accurate information and absolutely undertake to come back and talk to you again on that. Clearly as yes, the announcement at the end of last week about reinforced concrete and schools underlined, you know we do take the safety of children in schools incredibly seriously. And we're also aware that there is a need to update the existing guidance for some of the reasons that you suggested. And I'm also aware that this has been very delayed, partly because the Haslett inquiry and partly because of COVID and that is just, you know, kind of unavoidable. I think you're also aware of some of the changes that we've made to fire safety, so I can make sure I can send you a letter to make rather than running through them all now in relation to fire alarms, escape stairs, evacuation lifts in new builds, et cetera. So I hope you feel that we have listened to some of the advice that you've given us”?

“(Specifically speaking towards Zurich) – “In relation to the data that you kindly offered us - My understanding... - and correct me if I'm wrong... is that you have already shared some data with us. The advice I received is that it's just not at a level of granularity, that we can compare yours with ours. So if there's another chance to go around that loop and work out, can we get it at a way that we can use it, we would be extremely grateful for that”?

“Our current proposal, as I think you know, is that fire suppression systems (so sprinklers and water mist systems) should be in all new residential school buildings, all new special schools and any building which has got four stories, or is over 11 metres high; and my understanding is that this exceeds the building regulation requirements for all the reasons. I mean, I don't think we're trying to say we're heroes about that, but I think you set out the reasons why that is important, it is interesting that the profile - The fires in

England is very different to Scotland, and it appears to be - and a number of you mentioned arson and that the main difference - My understanding is there are 2 1/2 times as many fires in schools in Scotland and the main reason for that is much more arson than we see in this country. But that's not a reason to be complacent with that's just to reflect where there might be differences in our approaches. We, the consultation process is now completed. We're in the process of a write round to other government departments, as I say, I'll take this back as a matter of urgency to the department, and I commit here to communicating with you quickly with the outcome of that”.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: Just one point Minister - on the issue of the residential schools. They are not putting sprinklers in the schools, only in the residential accommodation attached to the school. Which is not quite the same as those schools are being sprinkler protected.

Baroness Barran: “absolutely. Sorry, I didn't mean to mislead”.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: “Apologies Minister, Sometimes it's misleading to who's the recipient of the message, and it sounds as though all those schools are being sprinklered, but still they aren't”.

Baroness Barran: “I'll make sure next time I say it clearer”.

APPG Fire Adviser/Hon.Admin. Sec. Ronnie King: Thank you Minister.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: “And the only other thing - let's say yourself or the department doesn't agree with us at all these schools (and you talk about the risk factors that you already accounted for). I would be interested in those areas that typically have a more challenging response time from our service. And those you know, (let's say right about Scotland) everywhere else - is there anything that also correlates to it or whether something that correlates to incidents of arson in that area so that you have a more sophisticated algorithm or risk that you've set out?”

Baroness Barran: “Yes, and that might be some of the big data that you referred to earlier. So yes, happy to take that away. Can you forgive me, I do apologise. I appreciate and know that we haven't had a full discussion but I certainly feel like I've heard really clearly from all of you your perspectives and we will come back to you quickly”.

Chris Waterman (representing Baroness Blower): “I am the author of: “The Plain Guides to the Building Safety Act”. And it is work I'm doing at the moment on lithium ion battery fires and this is a preventive measure. If we provide secure storage away from the building. I know it's not like sprinklers in schools, but this is another growing problem, as I'm sure the insurers and some of the other people here will be aware”.

Baroness Barran: “Thanks very much. Thanks. I must leave now - Good to see you all”

The meeting closed at 11.33am.

Signed: Date: 13th December 2023

Bob Blackman

Countersigned: Date: 13th December 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'R. King', written in a cursive style.