Approximately 6 weeks have passed since the NFSN met in Salisbury for our last meeting and AGM. How the world has changed in that passage of time with the spread of the awful coronavirus. The impact of the virus has been unprecedented, over shadowing everything, including even Brexit. It was unimaginable that something else would come along and trump Brexit and become responsible for stifling parliamentary progress on almost every other matter.

Yet today, there is light at the end of the tunnel. As I am writing this newsletter I have the BBC Parliament Channel on the television listening to MPs commenting on the second reading of the Fire Safety Bill, heralding changes and clarification to the way fire safety will be achieved and enforced in multi occupied residential buildings.

The Bill is being welcomed by all sides of the House, but equally there is a sense of common agreement across the House on the need to go further still. Much of the debate has been around the thorny issue of what to about existing cladded buildings and who should pay for the remediation of those buildings.

The Bill, introduced to the House by James Brokenshire MP has flexibility within it to pick up future amendments that may be necessary following the final outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiry and the recommendations of the Hackitt Review. This flexibility is welcome.

Also today the House was reminded that a review of building regulations for high rise buildings will be tabled shortly to further clarify the position on changes to building construction (including sprinklers) in relation to high rise buildings.

It seems that fire is still very much a priority, but as we head towards the third anniversary of the Grenfell tragedy, many MPs highlighted the lack of progress thus far and the spiralling costs of the waking watch schemes.

Listening to some of the comments from MP’s on the cost of waking watch in these high rise buildings, it does beg the question that the money would have been better spent on retro fitting sprinklers in these buildings, improving safety whilst cladding was awaiting removal and securing the best outcome for safety once the cladding is finally gone.

In the background the NFSN and in particular Ronnie King through the All Party Parliamentary Fire Safety & Rescue Group have been active in raising the issue of sprinklers and supporting members of the APPG to be able to contribute to today’s parliamentary debate across a range of fire safety related subjects.

It was also evident through many of the comments by Ministers and Members of Parliament, that sprinklers are recognised as part of the solution for modernising the building regulations and securing the future fire safety of buildings across England. Well done to all of you for promoting the benefits of sprinklers.

One thing is for certain, the collective work of the NFSN in supporting the research into sprinklers and promoting the benefits of sprinklers through engaging with NFCC sprinkler week and a range of other activities is beginning to pay off.

Over the last 6 weeks the NFSN has been liaising with the Home Office to secure a refresh of the sprinkler data that informed our original work on the effectiveness and reliability of sprinklers. You will recall the initial piece of research was complemented by a second data trawl to look at the effect of sprinklers on reducing deaths and injuries.

What we are looking to secure this time is a full data trawl, covering both areas and focussing on the next three year period, since the first research was completed. It is hoped that the increased prevalence of retro fitted and newly fitted sprinklers in high rise and other domestic settings since Grenfell will create even more examples of the efficiency of sprinklers and the cost effectiveness of them.

Our aim is to ensure that the focus on sprinklers will broaden from residential high rise to include other building types and hopefully to secure the understanding in Government that building protection and not just life safety should also be a priority. Schools and warehousing being examples we are well aware of.

To this end we have secured agreement from Home Office to have access to the data and we have commenced a discussion with Optimal Economics to assist in reviewing it.

It is hoped that the data will land with NFSN in the month of May.

**APPG Update**

I have received this update from Ronnie King and I have reproduced it here with his permission, given that the next NFSN meeting may need to be delayed. (To be confirmed).

I trust that yourself and families continue to keep well and safe during this difficult period, and I just wanted to briefly update you and colleagues on some of the ongoing work of the APPG and my role and work with its MP’s and Peers in Parliament.

 Personal contact with each APPG member is something I have been continuing to do since its last meeting on the 17th March, and since the ‘self isolation’ my role doesn’t seem to have got all that much easier.   I have consulted each APPG member individually on the DRAFT minutes and ‘action points’ from the 17th March APPG meeting, and on my draft response to Sir Martin Moore-Bick’s further letter re phase 1 Grenfell Public Inquiry Report. – (holding Conference calls with Lord Hunt, Lord Hendy, Sir David Amess MP).  A DRAFT Letter was amended and sent the Rt. Hon. Sir Martin Moore-Bick today (21 April), after fifteen replies and comments from APPG members.

I have consulted and advised APPG members on Government’s confirmation on the biggest changes to building safety in a generation, and drafted and consulted on the letter which has been sent to Sec. of State, Robert Jenrick MP from Sir David Amess MP, whilst exchanging correspondence with Zurich, RIBA, Coltraco and preparing a response to the MHCLG Combustibility review on behalf of the APPG.  I have exchanged correspondence with Russ Fleming in the changing roles at IFSA.   I have discussed with ‘Inside Housing’ the fact that homeless families are being moved into unsafe flats in Southwark, and shared this with the APPG; including a comment on Housing Secretary of State’s and mayor’s pledge that building safety work will continue during the pandemic. Additionally I have consulted APPG members and advised on a second response to Whirlpool following its letter from Ian Moverley Director, UK Public Affairs relating to the recent washing machine recall update:  <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/whirlpool-washing-machine-recall-update>

 I deal with most of the FIRE related correspondence which APPG Chairman Sir David Amess MP receives, often it results in my holding a meeting with the organisation or the individual concerned, to determine the validity or relevance of the issue, and then consult with the Group’s officers on its appropriateness and urgency for action by the APPG or the Chairman.  Since the Parliamentary restrictions on ‘non-passholders’, it has meant my conducting these meetings via video or audio conferencing; before ‘action’ is taken.

 In the last three weeks I have dealt with correspondence from Weber Shandwick to Sir David Amess MP re HPL cladding fails BS 8414 test badly;  with Tower Blocks UK – Hannah Brack and Frances Clarke-Robinson.  – A Video conference call with Chris Leese - Director – MPA UK Concrete and Special Advisor - Health & Safety and Robert Mcilveen Director Public Affairs -Mineral Products Association re sustainability;  dealt with request for information from Joshua Stein –  “New Civil Engineer”, from Mary Wedgewood FBU relating to Fire Officers use of cars, and from Tony Bird – Housing Consultant - re loss of his twin brother, and an update on his availability to contribute to current issues.

 I have held a Conference call with Tower Blocks UK and discussions and correspondence with Mike Wood and Sam Webb re façade performance and test results, and the Review of the ban on the use of combustible materials in and on the external walls of buildings.  Considered and responded to correspondence from Dods re online seminars. Exchanged correspondence with NADUK on Ventilation duct work testing, cleaning and Fire & Smoke Damper inspection, on behalf of APPG.   And it goes on………….as Parliament returns today with initially a decision to approve a motion facilitating ‘hybrid proceedings’, with effect from Wednesday 22 April.    (see attached).

 I will continue to keep colleagues informed of APPG and Parliamentary matters as it affects FIRE and BUILDING SAFETY, in order that a return to normal working will be that much easier, as and when that happens.

**Links to incidents and items of note:**

<https://www.stowmarketmercury.co.uk/news/suffolk-county-council-school-sprinkler-policy-1-6622380>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/24/sony-told-to-pay-bbc-5m-for-stock-damaged-in-london-riots>

**NEXT MEETING**

I am awaiting the Government announcement following the end of the current period of lockdown to see if any restrictions in movements are going to be lifted. This announcement is due the first week in May.

If the lockdown is extended and impacts on our next meeting in Essex I will write out and cancel the meeting.

As it stands at the moment, it is unlikely that we will be able to meet in Essex, but I think it is wise to let the next week or so unfold and re-assess.

Take care and please stay safe.

**Terry McDermott**

**NFSN Secretary**