

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Background

Around 580 homes across the borough of Barnet are thought to have been built between the 1920s and 1960s with a timber frame and a timber or UPVC façade. At least some of these properties are believed to be at increased risk of a serious fire spreading quickly, although we will not know exactly which ones until a full survey has been completed. Where a 'Category 1' hazard, as defined by the Housing Act 2004 using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is identified, work will be required to reduce the hazard to an acceptable level. This may include the exterior cladding on these two-storey homes being replaced. Barnet Council has written to and met with government and is working with them on this issue, including exploring what support can be given to homeowners. The Council has also written to the GLA who have asked Government for guidance on support as well.

Some of the homes were built by London County Council and then transferred to the Greater London Council (GLC) and subsequently to Barnet. The rest of these type of homes were built by the GLC and then transferred to Barnet.

### How did Barnet Council become aware of issues with the cladding on these homes?

Barnet Council only became aware of this issue following a house fire in Moss Hall Grove, West Finchley, in summer 2023. The fire spread quickly to neighbouring homes in the terrace and were destroyed.

### Why do these works need to take place?

Following the house fire, Barnet Council commissioned expert building consultants, Capital, to investigate a sample of similar properties. These properties were found to be at high risk of damage should a fire break out and with an increased risk of fire spreading quickly to adjoining properties. Alongside the timber frame of these buildings and fire stop issues, the cladding constituted a 'Category 1' hazard [as defined by the Housing Act 2004 using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#). This is the highest risk, and the council has a legal duty to take action to ensure the safety of residents living in the properties and neighbouring homes.

### How many properties are affected?

Approximately 580 homes in the borough of Barnet - a combination of council owned properties and properties owned by housing associations and private homeowners - may be affected. However, we will not know the precise number until the full survey of all homes is carried out.

### Where are the properties?

The properties are across the borough of Barnet, with the majority in Burnt Oak.

### When were the homes built?

The homes are thought to have been built between the 1920s and 1960s.

### When was the cladding installed to the homes?

Some properties have timber cladding which was originally installed at the time of construction. Other properties have had their original timber cladding replaced either with UPVC or newer timber. Barnet Council is not aware of the exact date that replacement cladding was installed, but believes it was during the late 1980s. This may be different for different estates. All types of cladding potentially need to be replaced (whether original or added later).

**Is it the same as the cladding material used at Grenfell?**

No, it is not the same as the cladding material at Grenfell.

**What construction methods were used to build the homes?**

There are four different types of construction that all vary, however, they are all constructed using a solid masonry separating wall between houses. This is then supplemented with a front and rear elevation in timber with a cladding material affixed. This façade generally spans the terrace.

**Compliance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System**

**Why do private homeowners have to make changes to their properties?**

Under the Housing Act 2004 the council has a duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under review to ensure that they are safe. The standard is called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). One of the considerations set by the government is in relation to fire. High risk hazards (category 1) and lower risk hazards (category 2) may be identified. If a category 1 hazard is assessed, then the council has a legal duty to make sure that the necessary action is taken.

We recognise that this is very difficult news, and we are committed to working with you to help you manage as much as we can. Ultimately, we have a legal duty as a council to keep you and your neighbours safe.

It's important to stress we want to work with residents to see if any works are required and, if they are, to identify the most cost-effective solution. We will only take enforcement action as a last resort, to protect all residents.

**Will any work be required if a category 2 hazard is identified?**

The HHSRS Enforcement Guidance document indicates that in some circumstances enforcement action may be appropriate where category 2 hazards exist, for example, where there is a vulnerable occupier or where there is more than one category 2 hazard. Each property will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**Is there any chance I will not need to undertake these works if my home is between two council-owned properties?**

There is a possibility that some properties may not require completion of these works depending on their condition and location. This can be clarified following a survey by the council.

We are aiming to start booking surveys from May 2024 and they will be undertaken over approximately a four to six month period. Appointments will be made for these, so please get in touch via the email and phone number to ensure that we can contact you directly to arrange this at a time convenient for you.

To discuss this further please contact:

[TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk) or telephone 0208 359 5348.

## Timeline of process

### Step 1

#### HHSRS Survey

(will commence in May 24 and by appointment)

### Step 2

#### Category of Hazard identified with residents.

- If Hazards are identified, information provided to freeholder in relation to work required.
- Survey shows no hazards are identified.

### Step 3

#### If HHSRS hazards are identified.

Decision from freeholder to take option 1 or 2.

- Option 1 - Request the Council to complete works.
- Option 2 - Arrange to complete works independently.

## Surveys

### When will the surveys take place?

We are aiming to start booking surveys from May 2024. Appointments will be made for these, so please get in touch via the contact details below to ensure that we can contact you directly to arrange this at a time convenient for you.

[TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk) or telephone 0208 359 5348

### Can I obtain a copy of the report/investigations that have been undertaken so far? Have the homes been declared defective by the survey?

A copy of the report is online on our website.

### Do I have to let you into my property to complete the survey?

Yes. Under the Housing Act 2004 the council have the right to inspect your property to determine if a Category 1 or Category 2 hazard exists under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. We are committed to working with you and would prefer not to take legal action to gain entry. Ultimately, we have a legal duty as a council to keep you and your neighbours safe.

### **What are you looking for when you survey my property?**

This exercise is not about identifying all building regulations and planning contraventions in relation to these properties. Any inspection of the property will be in relation to risk to the occupier. By way of an example, if an item of work was completed without building regs approval but the work has left the property without risk, no follow up will be required. If work has been carried out leaving the property at risk of structural collapse, the matter will be referred to Building Control for review. In addition, if there are people living in structures in the garden or the property is a house in multiple occupation this will be investigated further.

### **Are there any other issues with the properties?**

The property surveys may identify other issues under the Housing Act 2004. We believe some private homeowners may have removed chimney breasts from their homes. In some cases, this will have caused structural instabilities to neighbouring homes, which will need to be made safe.

## **If the council completes the remediation works**

### **Will there be any disruption to residents while works take place?**

If the works proposed are undertaken by Barnet Homes, then most works will be to the exterior of properties. Access required to residents' homes will be minimal. Scaffolding will be erected around residents' homes so works can take place. As with all projects there will be a level of disruption, but this will be kept to a minimum. Exact details will be provided when the programmes are available.

### **How long will the works take?**

If undertaken by Barnet Homes, they will take approximately three weeks to complete once contractors are on site. Barnet Homes will contact you to arrange a specific date for works to begin.

### **How will residents be kept informed during the process?**

Barnet Homes and Barnet Council will work closely with residents to ensure that works can take place as smoothly as possible. Residents will be kept informed through written and digital communication, and Barnet Council will host in-person and on-line sessions to discuss any questions or concerns residents may have. If you would like us to meet with you and your neighbours either in person or online, please contact us to arrange this on:

[TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk) or telephone 0208 359 5348.

If you choose for Barnet Homes to complete the works, you will have a dedicated project manager who will be the first point of contact for residents.

### **What exactly will homeowners get for the money they are being asked to pay? What is the exact process of what you are doing? What will it look like? What is it made from? How is it being installed?**

Barnet Council has developed a package of works which will be managed by Barnet Homes to ensure your home meets the current standards. This includes:

- Provision of a property specific schedule of work provided by a procured contractor.
- Obtaining Planning Permission, Building Regulation and Party Wall approval

- Site management of contractors to ensure that works are completed to the necessary standards
- Completion of remediation works – including cladding replacement.
- Option for a loan and repayment plan to help manage payment for the work subject to eligibility criteria or you can pay on completion of the work.
- A 12-year warranty, which will protect you in the event that there are latent defects in that period. The works will be supervised by chartered surveyors.

This work will take approximately three weeks to complete.

The exact process for work completion, work details, and costings will be determined once your survey has been completed.

Barnet Homes is currently working on various pilot projects which will provide examples of the type of works required and what the finished façade could look like. As these are pilots, we have taken into consideration options raised by freeholders and are investigating their viability. This includes brick piers, alternative materials and amendments to loft fire stopping. As we do not have final approval on any design at this stage, the proposed options we identified are the best design to meet all the fire suppression and legislative requirements. Every effort will be made to ensure that the visual appearance is in keeping with the current façade. This will be a requirement in any conservation area.

The current designs or any alternatives being reviewed may include the replacement of freeholder windows if desired. If the current windows remain, the plan is that they will be rebated slightly further into the cladding.

**Are you simply removing the cladding and replacing it with a cladding of another material? Or do you plan to also address the issue of cavities behind the cladding?**

The current proposal requires us to upgrade the insulation to meet the building control requirements as we would have met the threshold of substantial works, consequently requiring us to comply with the current regulations. If there are any opportunities to reduce the scope, which is currently being investigated, then we could omit the insulation as a significant amount of the cladding would stay, then reducing the building control requirements to comply with the current regulations around insulation.

However, if a freeholder wished to have the insulation upgraded in this circumstance, we could come to an individual arrangement to review how this could be achieved.

There is a real benefit to undertaking the insulation works as this will have a positive impact on the EPC rating and energy efficiency of the property, which will both offer likely savings on energy and make the property more appealing to any future purchasers.

**What assurance can you give residents that replacement cladding has been designed and finalised by a “properly qualified person”? Please provide the name of the person or the company who you have appointed to complete the work.**

Along with chartered surveyors Capital PCC, we are also procuring two building contractors to do the work.

No. Homeowners must ensure that the works are carried out to reduce the risk in the event of a fire. This can be carried out by a private contractor; however, the relevant permissions must be obtained from Building Control and the Local Planning Authority. A Party Wall agreement is also likely to be required. In addition, as the works are generally to one façade, an element of the works would need to be a collaboration of yours and your neighbours' builders if they are not the same, which may be more difficult to organise.

## If I am completing the works myself

### How do I organise completing the required works?

You can:

#### Use your own contractor.

If you would like to appoint your own contractor, the work will need to be signed off and approved by Barnet Council. You will need to obtain the relevant Planning, Building Control and Party Wall permissions. A general specification will shortly be listed on our website <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/fire-safety-timber-framed-homes> to assist you in conversations with your builder and help ensure that the relevant standards are met.

Employ Barnet Council to organise the work. Barnet Council has developed a package of works which will be managed by Barnet Homes to ensure your home meets the current standards, this includes:

- Provision of a property specific schedule of work provided by a procured contractor.
- Obtaining Planning Permission, Building Regulation and Party Wall approval
- Site management of contractors to ensure that works are completed to the necessary standards.
- Completion of remediation works – including cladding replacement.
- Option for a loan and repayment plan to help manage payment for the work subject to eligibility criteria or you can pay on completion of the work.
- A 12-year warranty, which will protect you in the event that there are latent defects in that period. The works will be supervised by chartered surveyors.

This work will take approximately three weeks to complete.

The exact work and costings will be determined once surveys have been completed.

Please contact us for more details if you wish to take this option.

Email – [TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk)

Telephone – 0208 359 5348.

### What are the advantages of accepting the council contractor versus procuring my own contractor?

- Specialist Contractor - The works are specialist fire safety works and should only be carried out by a competent contractor. Works carried out by Barnet Homes on behalf of the council will be by an approved contractor that has been through a robust procurement exercise to ensure value for money and quality assurance.

- **Guarantee** - The contract with Barnet Council will provide a 12-year warranty, which will protect you in the event that there are latent defects in that period. The works will be supervised by chartered surveyors.
- **Statutory Approvals** - Works carried out by Barnet Homes on behalf of Barnet Council will include statutory approvals such as planning permission and building regulations approval. Any party wall works will also be included where necessary. Works organised by the homeowner will require a separate planning application and submission of building regulations approval. The homeowner will also need to employ an architect, surveyor and potentially a party wall surveyor to do this.
- **Efficiency and Cost** - If one contractor is used to complete the work to a complete terrace this will make work organisation more straightforward and may lead to a reduction in cost.

## Costs, Funding, Loans and Repayments

### How much is the work likely to cost?

Current estimates for the remediation work indicate it could cost up to £23,000 per property, dependent upon results of the surveys.

### Is there any support to help pay for these works?

If a homeowner chooses for Barnet Homes to carry out the works, then a loan and repayment plan will be offered to eligible applicants. We are still sorting through the details of this and will give you more information as soon as it is available.

The following organisations may also be able to help with money advice:

- **BOOST**, Barnet's employment, training and benefits support service can provide advice on benefits and ensuring you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to.  
[https://boostbarnet.org/?page\\_id=261](https://boostbarnet.org/?page_id=261) or by calling 0208 359 2442
- Money advice is available from **Citizens Advice** <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/>
- Age UK Barnet – Can provide advice and support to residents over the age of 55  
Phone number: **020 8203 5040**  
Email: [info@ageukbarnet.org.uk](mailto:info@ageukbarnet.org.uk)

### When will further information be available about the loan and repayment scheme?

The council is working through the details of a policy on this, which will include details such as amounts, interest rates, terms and conditions. We do understand that it is frustrating for residents that we are not able to share this at this stage, but we aim to finalise this as soon as possible. Please do contact us so we know you are interested in finding out more about this. We can also help with referrals for money or benefits advice.

Please contact us to register your interest in the loan and repayment scheme:  
email – [TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk)

Telephone –0208 359 5348.

This does not mean you have to commit to the loan and repayment scheme. Barnet Council will then contact you directly with all the relevant information as soon as the complete offer has been finalised.

### **Are there any government schemes which can be used to cover the cost of the works?**

While Barnet Council has identified potential issues to some homes with timber frames and cladding, we believe this could be a national issue. Unfortunately, at present, government payments are only available for high and medium-rise buildings. Residents in these two-storey homes are currently not eligible for government assistance. However, the council has contacted the Government to review their policy which omits low-rise homes from cladding funding available and we await their response. Council Members are currently lobbying parliament for funding. We will let you know their response, and we are keen to work with all residents affected in raising this issue. More information on current Government support available for medium and high-rise homes can be found [here](#) or [Building Safety Fund guidance for new applications 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

### **I want to organise the works independently of the council, can I still apply for the repayment scheme?**

Unfortunately, Barnet Council will not be able to provide you with a loan and repayment scheme in this case. You can approach independent loan companies or your mortgage provider.

## **If works are not completed**

### **If private homeowners do not allow changes to be made, what will happen?**

Under the Housing Act 2004 the council has a duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under review to ensure that they are safe. The standard is called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). One of the considerations set by the government is in relation to Fire. High risk hazards (category 1) and lower risk hazards (category 2) may be identified.

If a category 1 hazard is assessed the council has a legal duty to make sure that the necessary action is taken.

We recognise that this is very difficult news, and we are committed to working with you to help you manage as much as we can. Ultimately, we have a legal duty as a council to keep you and your neighbours safe.

This is an emerging issue, and we believe that homes across the country could be similarly affected, which is why we have contacted government's Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Greater London Authority to see what support they can provide to residents. It's important to stress we want to work with residents to see if any works are required and, if they are, to identify the most cost-effective solution. We will only take enforcement action as a last resort, to protect all residents.

### **Could you provide more details in relation to the Housing Act and the powers under which the council will act in relation to this? What action will the council take if the works are not undertaken?**



Here's the technical information to this question for those who requested it:

Under sections 3-5 of the Housing Act 2004 the council must keep the housing conditions in their area under review and inspect residential premises with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them in relation to 29 specific hazards.

Fire is one of these hazards. When an inspection is completed, an assessment is carried out under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The assessment may identify high-risk hazards (category 1) and lower risk hazards (category 2). If a category 1 hazard is identified under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), the council has a legal duty to make sure that this is reduced to an acceptable level. If the works are not completed, and a high risk in the event of fire is identified, then regrettably, Barnet Council will need to take the appropriate enforcement action to ensure that homes are made safe in line with the council's Enforcement Policy:

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s76436/Appendix%201%20LBB%20Enforcement%20and%20Prosecution%20Policy%20for%20committee%20Final.pdf>.

This may include serving an Improvement Notice requiring completion of the work. Enforcement action will only be taken as a last resort to protect residents and neighbours.

## **Mortgages and Insurance**

### **Is my building and contents insurance affected by this?**

You are advised to contact your insurance provider for advice on this matter.

The Council cannot take any responsibility for insuring properties that we do not own, however, if you have experienced issues with your building insurance being cancelled, it would be helpful if you could advise us so we can use this in our communications with Department Levelling Up Housing & Communities.

### **Are these works covered by my building insurance?**

You are advised to contact your building insurance provider to check.

### **Is my mortgage affected by this?**

You are advised to contact your lender to check. Their consent to carry out any works to your property may be needed.

## **I would like to sell my property**

### **I am selling/thinking of selling my property, what do I need to do?**

If you are selling the property now or in the future, you will have an obligation to forward this information onto your solicitors and or buyers.

We may be able to buy your home, subject to certain criteria. If you are interested in exploring this option, please contact the Acquisitions Team at Barnet Homes on 020 8359 2057, or email [Acquisitions@Barnethomes.org](mailto:Acquisitions@Barnethomes.org) for further information.

## **Drop In Sessions**

### **When will drop in sessions take place?**

Caring for people, our places and the planet

We are offering 1-2-1 sessions on request at the council's office in Colindale (2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, NW9 4EW). We can also arrange an online meeting via MS Teams for individual households or groups of households. Please contact the Timber Frame Team on the email or by phone to arrange these:

[TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk) or telephone 0208359 5348

## Other

### **If the works are completed, but in the future the “rules” change again, will Barnet Council again hold the residents responsible for further changes?**

The council cannot predict what will happen with legislation in the future. However, post Grenfell the law around fire safety and fire safety standards has been rigorously reviewed and this is unlikely to happen again imminently. Unfortunately changes in legislation and regulations are at the discretion of the Government rather than the local authority.

### **I am a Leaseholder or a Shared Ownership owner, what do I do?**

If you are a leaseholder or a shared owner and are not listed as the freeholder with land registry, the freeholder of the property will be in touch with you to discuss this issue. For most leaseholders this will be Barnet Homes and they will be issuing a S20 consultation notice once the surveys have been completed. If you are a shared ownership owner, this would likely be with a registered provider, and you would need to contact them to discuss this matter.

### **Should I seek independent advice on this topic?**

Although we appreciate this is unwelcome and unsettling news, we are committed to being open and transparent in our dealings with you. We have employed an independent Residents' Advisor to support residents. This is someone who is independent of the council and Barnet Homes, who can advise residents on these matters. Her contact details are as follows:

Lurline Cumberbatch [L\\_Cumberbatch@ppcr.org.uk](mailto:L_Cumberbatch@ppcr.org.uk) 07447 263 252

You can, of course, seek your own legal advice too.

### **My smoke detector isn't working, what do I do?**

We can provide and install free smoke detectors to affected residents. Please email [TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk) or telephone 0208 359 5348.

### **Where can I find support to help me with my mental health?**

If you're concerned that you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, you should go to your local GP surgery first. You can talk directly to organisations in Barnet offering mental health support:-

- Barnet Wellbeing Service – you can refer online or your GP can refer you [www.barnetwellbeing.org.uk](http://www.barnetwellbeing.org.uk)
- Mind in Enfield & Barnet - 0208 906 7509

- Sanctuary Barnet (crises café) - call 020 8343 5704, open Monday to Friday 4.30pm to 10.30pm and weekends at 12pm to 6pm
- Samaritans – 116123

### **Who do I contact at Barnet Council?**

We have a dedicated team who are available Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. They can be contacted by email or phone.

Email – [TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:TimberFrameHomes@barnet.gov.uk)

Telephone – 0208 359 5348

Website - <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/fire-safety-timber-framed-homes>