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Events



Future of Fire Safety: Post-Grenfell Report

Roundtable Summary



Abstract

This publication summarises the key discussion and conclusions from a roundtable on the future of fire safety in the construction industry, particularly in light of the Grenfell Report. The conversation emphasised the need for a collaborative approach to improve standards, ensure accountability, and promote innovation without compromising safety. This document is being formally released at the Houses of Parliament on 21st October 2024 by The Institute of Construction Management and Resibuild.

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Executive Summary

This document summaries the key discussions and conclusions from a recent roundtable on the future of fire safety in the construction industry, particularly in light of the Grenfell Report. Industry experts from various sectors convened to address critical issues such as contractor licensing, subcontractor competence, the role of fire engineers challenges with building regulations, industry culture, and the use of technology in enhancing fire safety. The conversation emphasised the need for a collaborative approach to improve standards, ensure accountability, and promote innovation without compromising safety. The roundtable concluded with key takeaways for each participant, highlighting their commitment to advancing fire safety practices.



Table of Contents

1. Licensing and Regulation of Contractors and Subcontractors
2. Competence and Accreditation of Fire Engineers and Fire Risk Assessors
3. Challenges with Building Regulations and Approved Documents
4. Industry Culture and Behaviours
5. Early Contractor Involvement and Collaboration
6. The Role of Building Control and the Building Safety Regulator
7. Use of Technology in Improving Fire Safety and Quality Control
8. Importance of Fire Strategies and Early Involvement of Fire Engineers
9. Procurement Practices and Risk Sharing
10. Learning from Past Mistakes and Continuous Improvement
11. Participant Takeaways
12. Credits

1. Licensing and Regulation of Contractors and Subcontractors

Summary of Discussion:

The Grenfell Report recommended the licensing of contractors to enhance accountability and safety. Participants highlighted that principal contractors often act as conduits, with subcontractors performing most of the actual construction work. Licensing only principal contractors may not suffice; subcontractors also need to demonstrate competence.

Conclusions:

- **Need for Subcontractor Competence:** There must be standardised assessments to ensure subcontractors working on high-risk buildings (HRBs) are competent.
- **External Accreditation:** Subcontractors should undergo external audits similar to fire risk assessors, ensuring they meet industry standards.
- **Tiered Industry Structure:** Acknowledgement of the existing multi-tiered construction industry, with different levels of contractors serving various project sizes and complexities.
- **Regulation Implementation:** Licensing should be structured to effectively encompass both principal contractors and subcontractors, possibly by funnelling requirements through main contractors.



2. Competence and Accreditation of Fire Engineers and Fire Risk Assessors

Summary of Discussion:

The group stressed the importance of regulating fire engineers and fire risk assessors. There is concern about individuals claiming expertise without adequate qualifications leading to inadequate fire safety measures.

Conclusions:

- **Protected Profession:** Fire engineers should be recognised as a protected profession with stringent accreditation processes.
- **Regulatory Oversight:** Institutions like the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) should play a more active role in setting and enforcing standards.
- **Competence Verification:** There must be mechanisms to verify the competence of fire risk assessors, given their crucial role in interpreting fire safety regulations.



3. Challenges with Building Regulations and Approved Documents

Summary of Discussion:

Participants discuss the limitations of the current Building Regulations, specifically Approved Document B (ADB) related to fire safety. The document is seen as outdated, ambiguous, and not reflective of modern construction methods.

Conclusions:

- **Need for Revision:** ADB requires significant updates to address current building practices, materials, and technologies.
- **Prescriptive vs. Functional Requirements:** There's a debate on whether more prescriptive guidance would improve safety or stifle innovation.
- **Clarity and Relevance:** Regulations should provide clearer guidance on contemporary construction methods, life curtain walling and facade systems.



4. Industry Culture and Behaviours

Summary of Discussion:

The conversation highlighted the impact of industry culture on fire safety. Behaviours at all levels—from site workers to management—affect the quality and safety of construction projects.

Conclusions:

- **Behavioural Competence:** Beyond skills and knowledge, assessing and improving behaviours is crucial for safety.
- **Accountability and Ethics:** Encouraging a culture where individuals feel responsible and are willing to say no when tasks exceed their competence.
- **Shared Risk:** Promoting a mindset where all parties share responsibility for safety, rather than shifting risk down the supply chain.



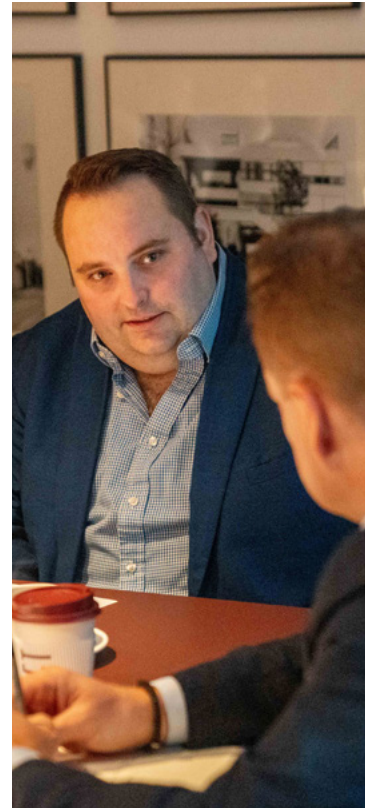
5. Early Contractor Involvement and Collaboration

Summary of Discussion:

Early involvement of contractors and collaboration among all stakeholders were identified as key factors in improving fire safety outcomes.

Conclusions:

- **Pre-Construction Service Agreements (PCSA):** Utilising PCSAs to involve contractors early in the design process.
- **Integrated Teams:** Forming collaborative teams that include designs, contractors, and specialists to ensure coherent and safe designs.
- **Shared Knowledge:** Leveraging the expertise of contractors and subcontractors during the design phase to anticipate and mitigate potential issues.



6. The Role of Building Control and the Building Safety Regulator

Summary of Discussion:

Concerns were raised about the effectiveness and independence of building control bodies, especially given their commercial relationships with contractors.

Conclusions:

- **Independence:** Building control should operate independently to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Competence of Regulators:** Ensuring that those checking compliance (e.g., during Gateway submissions) are sufficiently competent.
- **Resource Allocation:** The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) must be adequately resourced to fulfil its expanded role effectively.



7. Use of Technology in Improving Fire Safety and Quality Control

Summary of Discussion:

Technology was recognised as a valuable tool for enhancing fire safety and quality control through better record-keeping and oversight.

Conclusions:

- **Digital Records:** Utilising 360-degree cameras, drones, and building scanners for comprehensive documentation.
- **Behavioural Change:** The presence of recording technologies can promote better practices on-site as workers are aware of increased oversight.
- **Data Management:** Emphasising the importance of managing and utilising collected data effectively throughout the building's lifecycle.



8. Importance of Fire Strategies and Early Involvement of Fire Engineers

Summary of Discussion:

Fire strategies are essential documents that should be developed early and with input from qualified fire engineers.

Conclusions:

- **Comprehensive Fire Strategies:** These should cover not just compliance but also console the vulnerabilities of potential residents.
- **Early Input:** Fire engineers need to be involved from the outset to influence design decisions that impact fire safety.
- **Clarity of Roles:** Distinguishing between fire risk assessments, fire strategies, and fire management plans to avoid confusion.



9. Procurement Practices and Risk Sharing

Summary of Discussion:

Procurement methods influence how risk is managed and shared among project participants.

Conclusions:

- **Quality over Price:** Moving away from lowest-bid wins to considering the quality and competence of contractors.
- **Collaborative Contracts:** Adopting contracts that promote shared risk and collaborative problems-solving.
- **Supply Chain Management:** Main contractors should foster better relationships with subcontractors, focusing on fair treatment and shared objectives.



10. Learning from Past Mistakes and Continuous Improvement

Summary of Discussion:

The Industry must learn from past failures, such as the Grenfell tragedy, to prevent future occurrences.

Conclusions:

- **Cultural Shift:** Encouraging openness about mistakes to facilitate learning and improvement.
- **Mandatory Occurrence Reporting:** Implementing a system similar to the aviation industry to report and learn from incidents without fear of blame.
- **Continuous Training:** Investing in ongoing education and competence development across all levels of the industry.



11. Participant Takeaways

Jon Vanstone | Chair of the Competency Committee, Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

- **Improved Communication from BSR:** Acknowledged that communication from the Building Safety Regulator to the industry is insufficient and needs improvement. “I’m consistently frustrated by our communication into industry; it’s low at best and needs to improve”.
- **Industry Leadership:** Encourage the industry to take initiative in defining standards and processes. “If you wait for [the regulators], you can wait forever. It’s better to say, ‘This is what we’re doing until you tell us otherwise”.
- **Positive Outlook on Change:** Recognised that efforts in Gateway Two are leading to wider improvements in construction digitisation and contractual changes. “What you’re doing is leading wider construction digitisation and needs everywhere”.
- **Attracting Workforce Through Professionalisation:** Emphasised that rising industry standards will help attract a better workforce. “Raising the overall level of industry professionalisation...will really help solve one of my major issues, which is the workforce”.

Scott Humphris | Midfix

- **Education for SMEs:** Highlighted the need to educate smaller organisations on building safety. “A lot of these organisations are smaller micro-organisations... the more we can do to educate down into those smaller mindful organisations, the better”.
- **Profit Margins vs. Safety Priorities:** Noted that tight profit margins often compete with safety priorities. “It is the profit margins where they’re most squeezed... that often competes with the building safety priority”.

Nigel Gilbert | Reynaers Aluminium

- **Ongoing Learning Curve:** Acknowledged that the industry is still in an early learning phase. “Everyone’s in that kind of really early, all that horrible learning curve”.
- **Understanding Integration:** Expressed uncertainty about how their product knowledge fits into new regulatory processes. “I know where I am in terms of my product; it’s just how it’s going to work with the people I’m dealing with”.

Adam Wood | Buckley Gray Yeoman Architects

- **Early Contractor Involvement:** Emphasised the need for main contractors to be involved earlier. “Main contractors have to get involved earlier and their supply chain... we will work closer together through stage four”.
- **Preventing Delays:** Highlighted that collaborations can prevent delays in Gateway Two approvals. “These applications keep failing; it’s going to force the whole industry to say, ‘We have to spend longer’”.

Oliver Varley | Murphy Facades

- **Collaborations Despite Fee Limitations:** Stressed working together to develop detailed executives summaries. “We’re finding we’re doing all this technical validation... primarily to bring ourselves through this process with early contractor engagement”.
- **Industry Not ready for Detailed Early Detailed Early Design:** Noted challenges in contributing required detail at early stages. “The industry isn’t really ready for us to contribute to that level of detail in stage two”.

Lefteris Siamopoulos | FMDC

- **Time constraints and Information level:** Identifies time and unclear information requirements as main challenges. “The main challenge there is time, the level of information that is required that we don’t know”.
- **Need for Guidance from BSR:** Called for more guidance to reduce uncertainty. “Some guidance from BSR would be very welcome”.

Paul Bussey | AHMM Architects; Member of RIBA and CIC Committees

- **Less is More:** Advocated for concise executive summaries with strategic information. “Less is more... we’re looking at executive summary, strategic information, and then the detail can follow”.
- **Industry Should Lead:** Encouraged the industry to define the quality of information. “We’ve got to tell the regulators... that’s the message we’ve got to give back”.

Johnny Furlong | Dalux

- **Optimism in Change:** Viewed regulatory changes as an opportunity. “I actually take this as a positive... we can use everything that’s happening around building safety to drive a better quality agenda”.



- **Improving Profit Margins Through Quality:** Suggested that better quality will lead to improved profits. “Higher product quality... is going to reduce defects... there’s going to be more profit in the industry”.

Mark Pratten | Airey Miller

- **Excitement for Industry Evolution:** Expressed enthusiasm for the changes. “I’m actually quite excited about where this is going. I’m learning all the time”.
- **Early Engagement Thought PCSAs:** Support using PCSAs to involve contractors early. “Our view is that PCSA processes are the way forward to get that early engagement”.

Andrew Parsons | Sapphire Balconies

- **Embracing Change and Collaboration:** Encouraged acceptance of industry changes. “Just to accept that change is happening; we need to embrace it and collaboration for the greater good”.
- **Improving Safety Standards Together:** Emphasised working collectively to improve safety. “Let’s just all work together to make it happen”.

David Jones | The Institute of Construction Management; CIC Chair of London and South East

- **Competence, Cash Flow, Collaboration:** Identified key issues as “Competence is key. Cash flow is the killer, and collaboration”.
- **Need for a New Model:** Advocated for changing existing models. “We need a new procurement model; same old same old isn’t going to work”.

Nick Haughton | Sapphire Balconies

- **Clarity Over Complexity:** Recommended simplifying processes. “One is being clear first, not clever, so just making things perhaps a bit more simple as a starting point”
- **Raising Standards to Eliminate Poor Practice:** Noted that higher standards will benefit the industry. “Ultimately, it’s going to flush out a lot of poor practice... which is going to be better for all, I think”.

12. Credits

We extend our sincere gratitude to all the companies and individuals who contributed to this enlightening roundtable discussion.



Sapphire Balconies

Summary: Sapphire Balconies is the leading manufacturer of offsite manufactured balcony systems, specialising in a offsite manufactured balcony systems, specialising in a collaborative balcony journey streamlined by innovation.

Special Thanks: As the headline sponsor, Sapphire Balconies provided invaluable support and expertise, significantly contributing to the success of the event.



The Institute of Construction Management (ICM)

Summary: The ICM is a professional body committed to promoting excellence in construction management through education, accreditation, and advocacy.

Special Thanks: We particularly thank the ICM for partnering on the event and for taking the summary documents to the event at the Houses of Parliament as a key takeaway document.



Reynaers Aluminium Windows

Summary: Reynaers Aluminium is a leading supplier and installer of high-quality aluminium windows and doors, offering bespoke solutions for residential and commercial projects.

Special Thanks: We also extend our gratitude to Raynaers for partnering on the event.



Health and Safety Executives (HSE)

Summary: The HSE is the UK's regulator for workplace health and safety, providing guidance and enforcement to ensure safe working environments across all industries.

Special Thanks: We acknowledge Jon Vanstone, Chair of the Competency at HSE, for his valuable insights during the event.



AHMM Architect

Summary: Allford Hall Monaghan Morris (AHMM) is an award-winning architectural practice known for its innovative designs and commitment to sustainability.



Airey Miller

Summary: Airey Miller is a multidisciplinary consultancy offering project management, cost consultancy, and building surveying service, dedicated to delivering excellence in the built environment.



Buckley Gray Yeoman Architects

Summary: An award-winning architectural practice known for its creative and practical solutions, Buckley Gray Yeoman Architects works across various sectors, including residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects.



Dalux

Summary: Dalux is a software company specialising in digital tools for the constructions industry offering solutions for BIM, mobile field application, and facility management.



Firma

Summary: Firma provides brick support systems with a focus on innovative construction methodologies.



FMDC

Summary: FMDC offers face consultancy services, specialising in the design and engineering of building envelopes to optimise performance and aesthetics.



Lockmetal

Summary: Lockmetal is a specialist in the design, manufacture, and installation of bespoke metal cladding and facade systems, focusing on innovation and quality.



Midfix

Summary: Midfix provides support systems and fixing solutions for mechanical and electrical services, offering expert engineering and high-quality products.



Murphy Facades

Summary: Murphy Facades specialised in the design, manufacture, and installation of high-performance facade systems, delivering innovative solutions for modern buildings.



By bringing together diverse expertise and fostering open dialogue, this roundtable has contributed to the ongoing efforts to enhance fire safety in the construction industry. The collective insights and commitments shared will serve as a foundation for future initiatives aimed at building safer, more resilient structures.

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