



Scrutiny Topic:	How reassured customers living in tall buildings feel after receiving fire safety information post Grenfell?
Start / End Date:	November 2017 – February 2018
Board:	Thursday 26 th April 2018
Judgement:	A 'Good' Service

1. Introduction

Insight is a committed group of volunteer customers interested to help improve services delivered by Great Places Housing Group (GPHG). The group currently has 5 full-time and 1 part-time member, who carry out service reviews. Following the implementation of Great Places' new website, we aim to offer other ways customers can contribute to scrutiny and a key priority over the next 12 months is to increase membership.

The role of the group is to scrutinise specific services in detail, acting as a critical friend by reporting findings and suggesting recommendations to Great Places Board, representing the customer voice.

2. Review Service Area

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell in June 2017, we chose to explore 'how reassured customers living in tall buildings feel after receiving fire safety information.' Our reasoning for exploring this area is:

- to evaluate that customers had access to the information provided by Great Places,
- to gauge, whether contact from Great Places had contributed to help reassure customers,
- to provide customers living in tall building an opportunity to feedback to Great Places, an area we felt was extremely important.

3. Aim and Scope of our review

The aim of our review was to find out how reassured customers are around fire safety and gauge to what degree contact with Great Places helped provide reassurance. We set a clear scope to gather and consider intelligence relating to the following areas;

- the action Great Places took to provide reassurance to customers living in tall buildings
- assess how concerned customers feel about fire safety following Grenfell
- how important receiving information from Great Places about fire safety is to customers
- how reassured customers feel after receiving information from Great Places, and
- identify what helped provide reassurance to customers

4. Our Approach

We sought information from the fire safety team to hear of action Great Places took and any provision implemented post Grenfell, focusing specifically on information provided to customers, whilst assessing to what degree this offered customers reassurance. We surveyed customers, inviting them to share their views of action taken by Great Places in response to the fire at Grenfell, asking how reassured they were, or if Great Places could have done anything differently.

Listed below are the various ways information was collected:

Presentation by the Head of Compliance

The head of compliance presented a summary timeline of action taken by Great Places following the fire at Grenfell and any contact made with customers with the aim of offering reassurance of fire safety where they live. The presentation set out detail of Great Places' response to customers, in relation to the fire and outlined action taken to keep customers informed to provide assurance.

Desktop Review

We completed a desktop review of the detail provided in the presentation to help us process and digest the information, enabling us to agree our approach to the review. We compiled a number of questions to help provide clarity of Great Places intent to keep customers informed and their offer to reassurance.

Appointments with a Fire Safety Officer

To explore the function of the fire safety officers, two Insight members arranged to individually speak with an officer, i) during a home visit and ii) over the telephone.

Gathering feedback from customers

We sent approximately 1,000 customer surveys to gather views to inform our review; a short survey was emailed or via a link sent by text message. We noted a greater number of customers responded to surveys emailed. We also contacted customers who moved into their home following Grenfell to enquire if they had been provided with information by Great Places in relation to fire safety. A full breakdown of all tall buildings where surveys were issued is attached at appendix one.

5. Review of good practice and findings

Presentation by the Head of Compliance

We heard of action Great Places took after news broke about Grenfell, which would ensure safety whilst keeping customers informed to provide reassurance of fire safety.

Areas of good practice – timeline following Grenfell

- An emergency meeting took place the morning after Grenfell, comprising key members of Great Places staff such as the head of communication, head of compliance and the fire safety manager to discuss our immediate response.
- A statement was posted on the website by 12 noon the day following the fire to confirm Great Places' acknowledgement of the tragic event, providing customers with an update of immediate action to be taken – the aim of the post was to help reassure customers, whilst building confidence and trust at a time of unease
- The post detailed Great Places' intention to inspect all tall buildings owned and managed by the group; these are buildings greater than 6 storeys in height. It was important to Great Places, to inform customers that;
 - ✓ their health and safety remained a top priority to Great Places
 - ✓ all cladding material on tall buildings would be tested
 - ✓ all tall buildings had been subject to significant scrutiny, including reviews of fire risk assessments, inspections and audit by the fire service
 - ✓ all Great Places homes comply to strict fire safety guidelines
 - ✓ and that Great Places will act on any recommendations of the inquiry into the Grenfell fire
- Great Places employ 2 fire safety officers, whose function it is to inspect communal areas in accordance with a planned inspection rota, test fire alarms where fitted, deliver fire safety

information, display signage and attend resident meetings. Clear notification of the officers' names and contact details can be found on the notice boards in communal areas

- Immediately after news of the fire at Grenfell was announced Great Places fire safety officers visited all tall buildings to inspect communal areas and review existing fire risk assessments, any evacuation processes and whether the building fabric had been fitted with external cladding
- Joint visits with local Fire Rescue Services were conducted and a letter was hand delivered to customers to ensure a consistent message. The letter contained detail of any recommendations made by the FRS along with the contact number of our Customer Access team should customers have any concerns
- Customers were advised of planned meetings to be held on site to offer the opportunity to discuss any issues with the fire safety manager and local neighbourhood teams, the meetings were held 'out of hours' to maximise attendance of customers
- A task driven business continuity group of key stakeholders came together with representatives from the executive, communication, compliance, housing, health and safety as well as the finance team, with the primary aim to ensure safety of customers
- Information was gathered relating to building fabric, number of floors, building ownership, evacuation strategy, customer profile and areas of risk or immediate concern. The fire safety team met to review findings of inspections and to collate emails and information requests received from external stakeholders including local councillors and 4 x local FRS
- A robust action and communication plan was developed, which was visited weekly
- It was agreed customer enquires would be answered directly by the fire safety manager to ensure consistency, surprisingly we were advised only a small number of customers called
- A 2nd letter was hand delivered to customers advising the Department for Communities & Local Government, now known as Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had confirmed tall buildings with cladding had to be tested for ACM, (aluminium containing materials). Great Places immediately obtained samples of cladding, which were sent for combustibility testing to the Building Research Establishment, BRE
- A 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) leaflet was designed for customers, which set out practical and informative detail as listed below;
 - ✓ How are you making my building safe?
 - ✓ Is the cladding on my building the same as at Grenfell Tower?
 - ✓ Do we need communal fire alarms?
 - ✓ What do I do if I discover a fire?
 - ✓ What is a fire risk assessment?
 - ✓ How do I know that my block is safe and has been inspected?
 - ✓ How can I help to prevent a fire in my building?

Summary of findings

- Great Places advised no customer complaints were received relating to quality or quantity of communication provided in the weeks following the fire at Grenfell
- Building Research Establishment confirmed sample materials sent for testing were not the same, or a similar material to cladding fitted at Grenfell. Information has been collated of the cladding fitted at medium and low rise buildings too, however the focus was to prioritise tall buildings
- The evacuation policy in tall buildings have been categorised as 'stay put' with the exception of WestPoint View, following a request from Fire Rescue Service to change the policy. Customers living at WestPoint View were notified of the change in policy, which was followed by an on-site meeting to answer any questions. The signage setting out the escape route was changed in

agreement with the FRS. An evaluation to assess customers' vulnerabilities was carried out and customers were contacted to undertake a 'personal exit evacuation plan', (i.e. PEEP)

- Great Places instructed a 24 hour security at WestPoint View to provide a 'wakeful watch' to raise the alarm in case of fire, until a new communal fire alarm was installed; and PAT testing was carried out on all white goods as an extra precaution
- Cladding samples were suspected not to contain ACM, which was subsequently confirmed by the BRE, this was confirmed in writing with customers
- The outcome of the Grenfell inquiry will determine whether it is a requirement to fit sprinkler systems in tall buildings; it is anticipated Great Places would have to invest £1.25 million, if the outcome is to fit sprinklers. Great Places may choose to do so, regardless of this outcome.

Desktop Review

We reviewed the information provided during the presentation; discussing areas we felt we needed to gather greater detail and / or clarify information. These questions were passed onto the head of compliance; and with this supporting information we were able to agree a review scope. We agreed a number of questions to collect customers' views about the information provided by Great Places, their comments about fire safety, what worked well and / or any concerns.

Areas of good practice

- Fire extinguishers have been removed from communal areas in tall buildings to address the risk of incorrect use of this equipment, which could potentially cause further risk. Signage has been fitted in communal areas to provide advice to customers to get out as soon as possible via the safest route and call the fire service, if the fire is found in the communal area
- During planned inspections, the fire safety officers advise customers, if obstructions are found in communal areas to remove, providing justification for the request ensuring no misunderstanding
- Officers test emergency lighting and panic buttons as well as liaise with local FRS

Summary of findings

- Customer meetings took place at all tall buildings 'out of hours' to provide opportunity for questions in an attempt to dispel any miscommunication heard in the media and provide clarification and reassurance. We were surprised to hear only a small amount of customers attended these meetings with the fire safety manager and housing teams
- Upon completion of the Grenfell inquiry there will be a new piece of legislation in relation to fire safety including advice for evacuation in the event of a fire
- Great Places encourage and will support customers to make arrangements with their local FRS to have an evaluation of their home, which will help to provide further reassurance to customers
- CAT and frontline staff were versed to answer customer enquiries to consistently deliver a clear and informative message, which can be relied on to build confidence and trust

Appointments with Fire Safety Officers

Summary of findings

Insight members contacted the fire safety officers to enquire about responsibilities of their role, to undertake a PEEP and ask questions in relation to customer enquiries following Grenfell;

- During their discussions with the fire safety officers it was confirmed only a small number of customers made contact immediately following Grenfell with enquiries

- The fire safety officers re-iterated they had visited all tall buildings owned or managed by Great Places and amongst other tasks they regularly inspect communal areas, and officers also confirmed their contact details are displayed on noticeboards for customer information
- A suggestion was raised during one of the appointments to offer basic fire safety training to neighbourhood housing and repairs teams, to check smoke alarms, identify obstructions or obvious hazards to be referred to the fire safety team to follow up, increasing opportunity to impart guidance
- A 'stay-put' policy has been confirmed with customers living in tall buildings besides WestPoint View, however it was mentioned if customers were to feel in danger that they should take appropriate action moving safely to an area of no hazard
- The fire safety officer discussed with each Insight member any vulnerabilities and concerns about evacuating the building safely, imparting guidance and reassurance to the individual so they are aware of the best way to manage a potential hazardous situation

Feedback from customers

Summary of findings

We commissioned the customer involvement team to survey customers to explore whether they feel reassured following receipt of fire safety information from Great Places.

We focussed the survey questions on the following 3 areas;

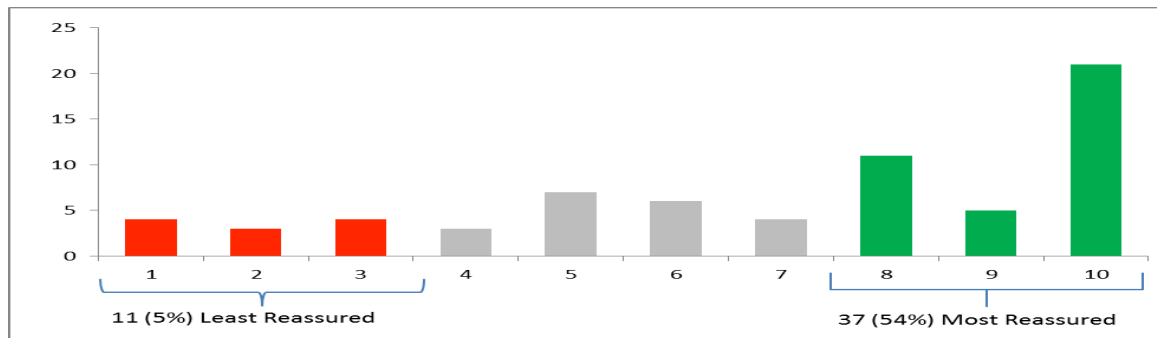
- How concerned are you about fire safety where you live post Grenfell?
- How important is it for Great Places to provide fire safety information?
- How reassured are you by the information provided by Great Places?

In addition, customers were asked to identify any specific actions carried out by Great Places, which helped provide reassurance. A sample of 1000 customers living in tall buildings was asked to feedback by completing the survey of questions. We emailed approximately 700 customers and where an email address wasn't available; a link to the survey was text to customers' mobile number.

We received responses from 68 customers, which represent 7% of all surveys sent out to customers. We deliberated that it could be interpreted the low response rate may mean customers hadn't felt a need to respond, possibly as they didn't have any concerns to feedback. Although to evidence this theory, more work to gather further detail would be necessary to reliably demonstrate this point. Our analysis of evidence demonstrated there weren't any findings of great significance to cause alarm; which is reflected in our 6 recommendations that predominately focus on the development of on-going work to reinforce fire safety information with customers.

The following graphs show the spread of scores provided by customers on a scale of 1 to 10, as well as the number of responses received for each of the three questions contained within the survey.

i) How reassured are you by the fire safety information provided by Great Places?



54% of customer responses (37/68) were most reassured about fire safety, providing a score between 8 and 10, where 10 denotes reassured

Comments from customers who were reassured:

- They did a great job at sending out newsletters to all residents very soon after
- Since Grenfell, Great Places have kept me informed
- Letters were displayed in communal areas
- I'm happy with how Great Places are handling things

Of the 37 responses who were most reassured after receiving fire safety information from Great Places, 30% (11/37) had initially cited they were concerned about fire safety where they live following the fire at Grenfell, scoring 8 to 10, (where 10 denotes very concerned).

Comments from customers who were reassured but had expressed concern:

- You worry it could happen to you
- Bin room inside the building and access to it, doesn't seem to be good enough
- I just get concerned because the Astoria isn't the best built building in the world and has a history of problems so I'm not sure how it would stand up to a fire
- I've heard fire alarms going off for hours and never seen a sign of the fire brigade or it being turned off, until I call the fire brigade or report it to Great Places via the out of hours service

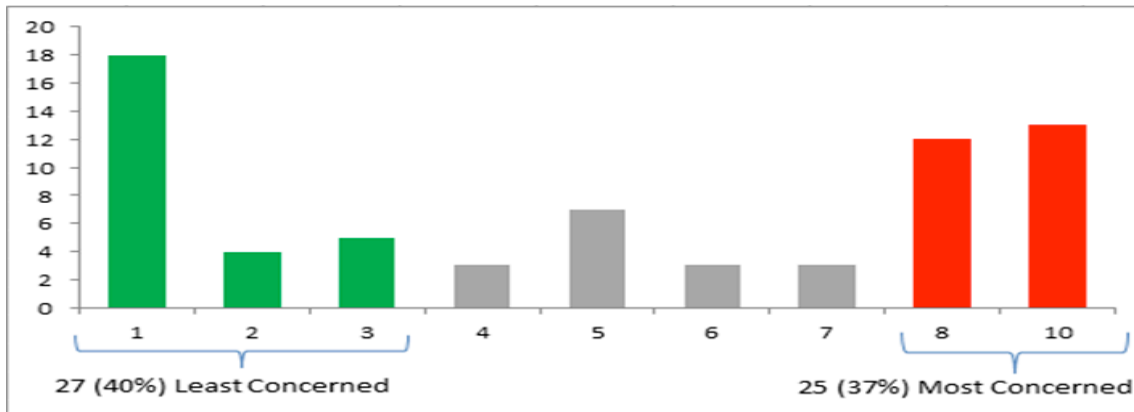
When analysing the feedback, a number of comments highlighted concern, which was directly linked with issues relating to the building in which customers live. This demonstrates customers' perception of fire safety is also influenced by issues associated with the building containing their flat, fuelling unease. We acknowledged this concern and collectively agreed to pass these comments on; we were advised the fire safety manager wrote to customers to provide more detailed information and clarity, with the aim of building confidence. No further contact was made to the fire safety team by these customers showing the worth of keeping customers informed. A good example, we found during our review, which demonstrates this is the provision of the fire safety officers who address concerns directly with customers to lessen any unease.

Comments from customers who were least reassured:

- Only had one letter, regarding fire safety
- Not had any information

Both comments outline customers' perception they hadn't received information, potentially this point shows that a lack of information can negatively impact on customer's levels of assurance.

ii) How concerned are you about fire safety where you live following the tragedy at Grenfell?



37% of customer responses (25/68) said overall they were concerned about fire safety, providing a score between 8 and 10.

44% of customer responses (11/25) who showed concern said they were reassured after receiving the fire safety related information from Great Places.

Comments from customers who were concerned:

- Safety is paramount when living in high rise blocks, we need to know what to do in case of fire,
- I would like to know how often the communal fire system is tested
- We should be told everything we need to be told regarding fire safety

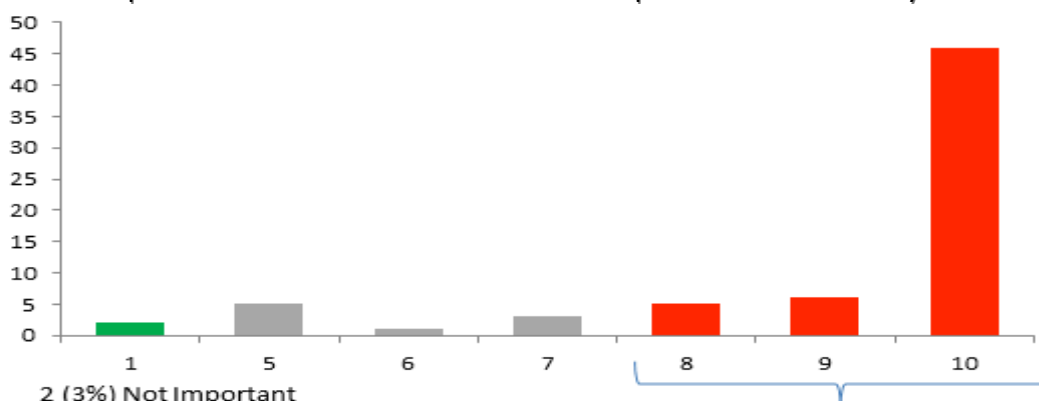
Customers who expressed concerns were contacted by the fire safety manager; one such concern related to disability and an individual living above ground floor. The fire safety team agreed to contact the customer to organise a home visit to assess any potential fire risk. If risk was identified permission would be sought to make a referral to Greater Manchester Fire Rescue Service, GMFRS for a ‘safe and well’ visit. This visit would provide advice and some control measures for any potential risks. The neighbourhood team would be advised and if further support can be offered this would be arranged with the customer’s agreement.

We identified following further analysis of the customer feedback that 25% of the overall 68 responses were provided by customers living in Parkhill, Sheffield. The feedback highlighted that customers living on higher level floors in the building showed more concern about fire safety and were less reassured compared to those customers living on lower floors of the building. This detail is illustrated in appendix two, if the single response from Gilbert is looked at separately.

Our finding was raised with the fire safety team to follow up with the Sheffield housing team, who confirmed information was posted in communal areas on noticeboards and in lifts at Parkhill, but that letters weren’t individually hand delivered.

One customer response received supports this finding; ‘the only information was in lifts and on the notice board as I recall, not an individual letter to residents (unless I didn't receive any) and there was no detail in the notices’

iii) How important is it for Great Places to provide fire safety information



Customers' feedback a majority view that they feel it is the responsibility of Great Places to provide fire safety information, with 84% of the 68 responses scoring between 8 and 10, where 10 denotes very important. Analysis highlighted that 74% of customers despite not having any great concern (scoring 1 to 3), felt it is important for Great Places to provide fire safety information.

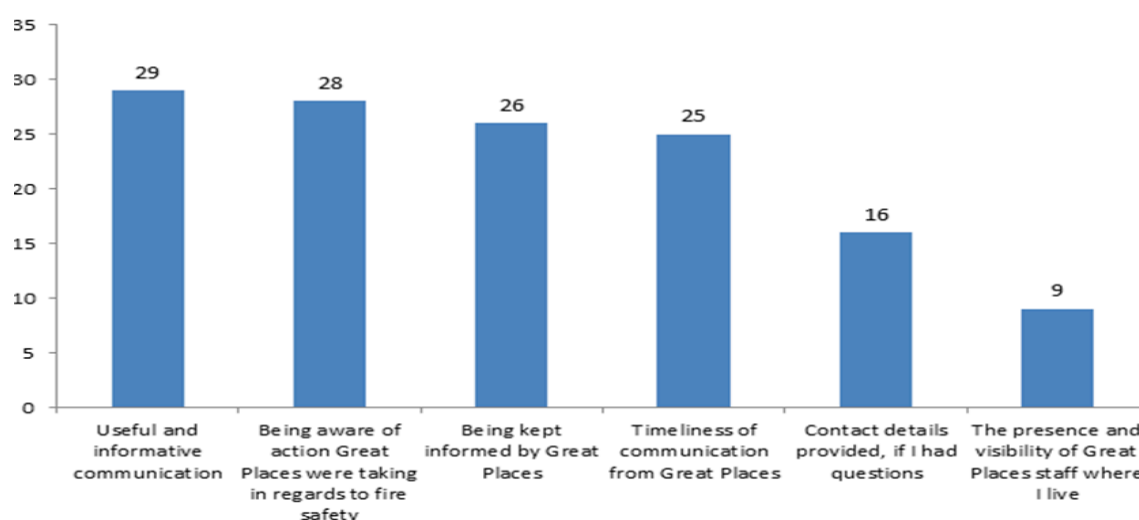
Comments from customers asked about the importance of fire safety information:

- It is the responsibility of Great Places to give information on fire safety information
- We need to know the risks and strategies to handle them
- It is of paramount importance that people know what to do in case of a fire and they are aware of up to date procedures
- I think it's good to at least annually review and update residents on the state of the building in regards to fire safety. The building should be checked to ensure it is compliant with regulations
- To be kept up to date with new fire regulations

Customers were asked to describe what aspects helped to provide reassurance, the chart below sets out customers' responses. The key aspects influencing whether customers were reassured were as follows;

- useful and informative communication,
- being aware of action Great Places were taking in regards to fire safety and
- kept informed and the timeliness of communication from Great Places, which can be seen on the following chart, this is shown in the chart below;

What aspects helped customers to feel more reassured about fire safety?



Customers who moved to their home post the fire at Grenfell

As part of the consultation customers who'd moved post Grenfell were sent a survey to enquire;

- whether they had received fire safety information from Great Places
- how concerned they were about fire safety where they live, and
- how important it is to be made aware of fire safety by Great Places

We received responses from just 8 customers; 50% reported they'd not received information. When asked 'how concerned customers were on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not concerned' the average score was 5.63 - 3 of the 8 responses provided a score between 8 and 10, (37.5%).

When asked 'how important it is Great Places provides fire safety information' customers who moved to their home after the Grenfell fire gave an average score of 9.88, 100% of the responses gave a score between 8 and 10, where 10 represents 'most important'. This reflects the opinion of the responses from customers, who were living in their home at the time of the fire, supporting a consensus that customers feel responsibility to inform customers of fire safety lies with Great Places.

Summary of key findings from customer consultation

- 54% of 68 responses show customers were most reassured by the fire safety information provided by Great Places, giving a score between 8 and 10 on a scale from 1 to 10
- 70% of responses indicate being reassured, giving a score between 6 and 10
- Customers were reassured to be kept informed and aware of steps taken in regards to fire safety
- The timeliness of the communication was reported to contribute towards reassurance
- Issues relating specifically to a tall building where customers live can contribute negatively to their perception of fire safety
- Some customers expressed concern about the guidance to 'stay put policy' reflecting a lack of confidence and trust, this view is fuelled by the events, which occurred at Grenfell
- Customers feel strongly it's Great Places' responsibility to provide fire safety information
- Feedback showed some customers want to be aware of fire safety provisions and be able to raise issues relating to fire safety

6. Recommendations

Based on evidence findings from our review, we propose the following recommendations;

1. Reinforce with customers the reason for a 'stay put policy' in tall buildings providing context for this decision
2. Ensure customer communication is delivered as intended and any instruction has been acted on consistently across regional teams
3. Provide fire safety information and highlight any arrangements with new customers
4. Promote more widely with customers the role of fire safety officers to encourage customers to make contact with any fire safety concerns or if they have a request for specific detail, such as dates of building inspections or Fire Risk Assessment information
5. Plan regular communication with customers, across a range of mediums including texts and website, to keep them up to date with action taken by Great Places and reinforce information such as 'what to do if a fire is found in a flat, communal area or a fire alarm is heard' and 'ways to help prevent a fire' expanding on detail set out in FAQs leaflet
6. Support and develop the culture of fire safety with all neighbourhood and repair staff to be able to keep customers informed, report issues to fire safety officers or direct customers to fire safety officers

7. Overall Judgement

In order to provide context to our review, we used the evidence gathered to score 4 customer focussed criteria as a 'poor, fair, good or excellent' to enable agreement of an overall judgement.

Criteria	Score
Timeliness of communication	Excellent
Quality of communication	Good
Overall level of customer service	Good
Customer satisfaction of experience	Fair

We used the 4 scores to determine an overall judgement of 'good' following our review. We'd like to outline our decision to award customer satisfaction 'fair' was based collectively on the customer feedback scores and comments. Analysis of feedback revealed although fire safety information and contact with Great Places had reassured customers, for some, their concern was influenced by additional factors such as issues relating to the building and / or personal circumstances. We feel the action plan will build on work already undertaken to publicise fire safety information, whilst encouraging customers to contact officers and when implemented will help build confidence.

Appendix One:

	Site	No. Floors	No. Units	Evac Policy	AREA	Owned by
1	Bowland House	14	79	Stay Put	Blackburn	GPHG
2	Willow Crt. (Mcr)	8	48	Stay Put	Gatley	GPHG
3	The Vibe	9	151	Stay Put	Manchester	GPHG
4	The Astoria	6	49	Stay Put	Oldham	GPHG
5	Westpoint	7	40	Sim Evac	Bolton	GPHG
6	Broad Road	7	46	Stay Put	Sale	GPHG
7	Park Hill	14	270	Stay Put	Sheffield	Not Owned by GPHG
8	Lansdowne Court	15	87	Stay Put	PFI	Not owned by GPHG
9	Stockfield Mount	14	90	Stay Put	PFI	Not owned by GPHG
10	Tribe New Islington	13	64	Stay Put	Manchester	Not Owned by GPHG
11	Tribe East Quarter	13	64	Stay Put	Manchester	Not Owned by GPHG
12	Tribe Ancoats	13	64	Stay Put	Manchester	Not Owned by GPHG
14	Little Alex	7	25	Stay Put	Manchester	Not owned by GPHG

Appendix Two:

Responses from Parkhill customers accounted for 25% of the overall 68 responses and analysis showed a trend that customers living on higher level floors in the building showed more concern about fire safety and were less reassured compared to those customers living on lower floors of the building. The diagram below illustrates this finding, if the single response from a customer living at Gilbert is looked at separately.

