Guidance Document

GD 28 - Fire Safety in the Workplace

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Fire is a significant hazard to the safety of both buildings and their occupants. All buildings and human activity represent some form of fire hazard; the aim of the Council is to reduce such hazards in places where people work to a minimum.

This document will help managers and employees to work in a manner that will protect people using Council workplaces from fire related risks.

There is a duty to undertake a fire risk assessment in each and every workplace (permanent or temporary) and the content of this guidance will give provide information on a wide range of fire safety matters that will help minimise fire risk.

Information is provided as follows:

1. Responsible Person
2. Keeping Records
3. Fire Wardens and Fire Controllers
4. Fire Safety Training
5. Fire Drills
6. Arson Prevention
7. Housekeeping
8. Machinery and Equipment
9. Electrical Safety
10. Dangerous Substances
11. Managing Building Work
12. Help for People with Special Needs
13. Developing an Emergency Plan
14. Fire Signage

1.   The Responsible Person

The responsible person has the responsibility of co-ordinating many of the fire safety elements within a workplace. This will normally be the senior manager of the Council Service with the largest number of employees present within the workplace.

The responsible person for each premise will:

- be responsible for the fire safety of the buildings which they manage;
- appoint one or more competent persons (e.g. fire wardens) to assist in any of the measures listed in this section;
- ensure that an emergency plan is established to incorporate procedures to follow in the event of serious and imminent danger, including:
- designating a person designated to supervise the efficiency of evacuations;
- identifying people with special needs, recording where they are located in the building and planning action to assist them in the event of fire;
- ensure that measures required in the fire risk assessment are implemented by the specified deadline;
- review their fire risk assessment at least annually, or whenever significant change occurs to the building or the activities carried out;
- contact their if their fire risk assessment requires a full review (following the criteria in the annual review;
- ensure that regular inspections of the working environment are undertaken to ensure that good housekeeping is maintained;
- ensure that the premises and any equipment provided in connection with fire fighting, fire detection and warning, or emergency routes and exits are covered by a suitable system of maintenance, and are maintained by a competent person in an efficient state, in good working order and in good repair;
- ensure that records are kept of all fire safety maintenance checks, as detailed in document;
- consult employees and their safety representatives about nominating people to carry out particular roles in connection with fire safety (e.g. fire wardens) and about proposals for improving the fire precautions;
- provide all people working within the premises with comprehensible and relevant fire safety information on:
- the risks to them identified by the risk assessments;
- the measures taken to prevent fires;

- how these measures will protect them if a fire breaks out;

- the identities of the appointed fire wardens;

- their responsibilities.

- co-operate and co-ordinate with other Responsible Persons who also have premises in the building, inform them of any significant risks which affect them, and how they will seek to control the risks which might affect the safety of their employees.

2.   Keeping Records

Managers will need to ensure that up-to-date records are kept of the actions needed to manage fire safety. This will:

a) help minimise the potential for fire to occur, and
b) demonstrate compliance with fire safety law.

Records should be kept in a specific place on the premises (preferably with the fire risk assessment), and should include:

- details of any action taken following the fire risk assessment;
- testing and checking of escape routes, including final exit locking mechanisms such as panic devices, emergency exit devices and any electromagnetic devices;
- testing of fire-warning systems, including weekly alarm systems, including weekly alarm tests and periodic maintenance by a competent person;
- testing and maintenance of emergency lighting systems;
- testing and maintenance of fire extinguishers, hose reels and fire blankets etc;
- recording and training of relevant people and fire evacuation drills;
- arrangements in a large multi-occupied building for a co-ordinated emergency plan leading to an effective roll-call;
- all alterations, tests, repairs and maintenance of fire safety systems, including passive systems such as fire doors;
- periodic safety audits, inspections and tests, and any remedial action taken.

HSF23 – Fire Log Book is available via CONNECT to help managers collate all necessary information.

3.   Fire Wardens and Fire Controllers

The role of the fire warden and fire controller is outlined in detail within GD5 – Fire Controller and Warden Duties. By way of a short summary those undertaking the role of Fire Warden may have the following duties:

- helping those on the premises to leave;
- checking the premises to ensure everyone has left;
- using firefighting equipment if safe to do so;
- liaising with the Fire and Rescue Service on arrival;
- shutting down vital or dangerous equipment;
- performing a supervisory role in any fire situation.

Those taking on the role of Fire Warden or Fire Controller will be expected to undergo relevant information, instruction and/or training. More information on this is contained within GD5 and can also be found on CONNECT, however the following can be considered as indicative of the areas that are likely to be covered in any such training etc.:

- knowledge of the fire safety strategy of the premises;
- awareness of human behaviour in fires;
- how to encourage others to use the most appropriate escape route;
- how to search safely and recognise areas that are unsafe to enter;
- the difficulties that some people, particularly if disabled, may have in escaping and any evacuation arrangements that have been pre-planned;
- additional training in the use of fire fighting equipment;
- an understanding of the purpose of any fixed fire fighting equipment such as sprinklers;
- reporting of faults, incidents and near misses.

4.   Fire Safety Training

Every employee should receive information, instruction and training on relevant aspects of fire safety. This is required:

- when someone starts employment or are transferred into the premises;
- when changes have been made to the emergency plan and/or the preventive and protective measures;
- where working practices and processes or people's responsibilities change;
- to take account of any changed risks to the employees, pupils, service users or other relevant persons;
- to ensure that staff know what they have to do to safeguard themselves and others on the premises;
- where staff are expected to assist in the evacuation of someone with impaired mobility.

Managers should have a local induction checklist that will include details of the fire topics that should be covered. Line managers will also need to ensure those with particular fire safety duties receive the necessary initial and refresher training.

The training needs of those workers who are at special risk, e.g. lone workers, should also be taken into consideration. If employees work night shifts, some drills should be held at night.

A tool box talk resource is available on the "Fire" pages of CONNECT.

5.   Fire Drills

Once an evacuation plan has been developed and training given then effectiveness of the plan should be assessed via the use of a fire drill. A fire drill should be carried out at sufficient intervals to guarantee that all building users take part in at least once drill per year. In practical terms this will mean an average of 2 or 3 drills per year as managers try to include job share workers, part time workers, weekend workers, night shift workers and building user groups. There may be some specific cases where the number of drills held may increase beyond 2 or 3 (e.g. community centres, museums etc) to ensure all user groups have been involved in a drill. Service specific guidance should be consulted to ensure local frequencies are being met.

A well-planned fire drill will confirm understanding of the training given and provide helpful information for future training. The responsible person should aim to use evacuation drills to:

- Identify any weaknesses in the evacuation strategy;
- Test the procedure following any recent alteration or changes to working practices;
- Familiarise new occupants with procedures; and
- Test the arrangements for disabled people.

Who should take part in a fire drill?

Within each building the evacuation should be for all occupants except those who may need to ensure the security of the premises, or people who, on a risk-assessed basis, are required to remain with particular equipment or processes that cannot be closed down.

Premises that consist of several buildings on the same site should be dealt with one building at a time over an appropriate period unless the emergency procedure dictates otherwise.

6.   Arson prevention

In the main most fires affecting North Lanarkshire Council properties have been the result of arson. The ability and frequency of some to deliberately set fires in and around a property will be indicative of an increased risk to that establishment. Managers should carefully assess the risk and take advice from the safety and wellbeing team. The local fire risk assessment should have taken on board the risk of arson when developing the fire risk assessment.

Fires started deliberately can be particularly dangerous because they generally develop much faster and may be intentionally started in escape routes. Of all the risk-reduction measures, the most benefit may come from efforts to reduce the threat from arson.

Measures to reduce arson may include the following:

- Deter unauthorised entry to the site by limiting site entrances, providing appropriate boundary security and implementing controlled site access;

- Thoroughly secure all entry points to the premises, but make sure this does not compromise people's ability to use the escape routes;

- Ensure the outside of the building is well lit;

- Make sure combustible rubbish is regularly removed;

- Do not place rubbish skips adjacent to the building;

- Do not site wall-mounted waste bins beneath windows or on walls covered in combustible cladding – in general secure waste bins in a compound separated from the building;

- Promote good relations with neighbours who overlook the property – they can be useful 'eyes and ears' when the premises is unoccupied.

7. Housekeeping

Good housekeeping will lower the chances of a fire starting, so the accumulation of materials in premises should be monitored carefully. This is particularly important in reducing the chance of escape routes and fire doors being obstructed.

To reduce the risk of a fire occurring in a property out of normal hours, it is important that proper "close down" procedures are applied, particularly in higher risk areas such as kitchens, laboratories and workshops. Close down checks should include checking that:

- Refuse/waste has been removed from the premises and placed in secure storage;
- Flammable materials are locked away;
- Equipment and machinery is switched off;
- Valuable equipment is secured;
- Internal doors are closed;
- External doors have been secured.

8. Equipment and Machinery

Lack of preventive maintenance increases the risk of fire starting in equipment and machinery. Common causes of fire are:

- Misuse or lack of maintenance of cooking equipment and appliances;

- Allowing ventilation points to become clogged or blocked, causing overheating;
- Allowing extraction equipment in catering environments to build up excessive grease deposits.

All machinery and equipment should be properly maintained by a competent person. Appropriate signs and instructions on safe use may be necessary. More information on the safe use of machinery can be found within AS8 – Safe Use of Work Equipment.

9.   Electrical Safety

Poorly installed and maintained electrical equipment can be a significant cause of accidental fires. The main causes of fire are:

- Overheating cables and equipment, e.g. due to overloading circuits, bunched or coiled cables or impaired cooling fans;
- Damaged or inadequate insulation on cables or wiring;
- Combustible materials being placed too close to electrical equipment which may give off heat even when operating normally or may become hot due to a fault;
- Bunched cables passing through insulant which can generate excessive heat;
- Lack of maintenance or testing.

All electrical equipment should be installed and maintained in a safe manner by a competent person.

If portable electrical equipment is used, including items brought into a workplace by employees, then it should be visually inspected and undergo portable appliance testing ("PAT") at intervals suitable for the type of equipment and its frequency of use.

An extensive range of support material exists to help managers to put in place appropriate systems this includes:

- AS16 Electricity in the Workplace;
- IS46 electrical inspection and Testing;
- GD 22 – Safe Use of Electrical Extension Cables (or similar);
- GD9 - Electrical Testing of Portable Equipment and Fixed Systems.

10.   Dangerous Substances: Storage, Display and Use

Specific precautions are required when handling and storing dangerous substances to minimise the possibility of an incident. Suppliers should be able to provide detailed advice on safe storage and handling, however, the following principles will help reduce the risk from fire:

- Substitute highly flammable substances and materials with less flammable ones;
- Reduce the quantity of dangerous substances to the smallest reasonable amount necessary;
- Correctly store dangerous substances, e.g. in a fire-resisting enclosure. All flammable liquids and gases should ideally be locked away, especially when the

premises are unoccupied, to reduce the chance of them being used in an arson attack;
- Ensure that employees are aware of the fire risk that any dangerous substances present and the precautions necessary to avoid danger.

AS13 – Control of Substances Hazardous to Health and GD38 – Flammable Liquids provide further information on the how fire risks from dangerous and flammable substances can be managed

11. Managing Building Work and Alterations

Buildings are at an increased risk of fire when they are undergoing refurbishment or alteration. It is therefore critical that before any building work starts the existing fire risk assessment is reviewed and the foreseeable additional dangers are considered. The contractor undertaking the work should be able to contribute to this discussion.

Additional risks may well come from:

- Hot work;
- Inappropriate storage;
- Unavailable fore exits;
- Alterations to wiring that may affect alarm systems;
- Unavailable assembly points;
- Change in access for emergency services etc;
- People unfamiliar with the property layout or activities that take place.

Planning of such work is vital and as much time as possible should be devoted to planning for the fire and other safety implications of the work. Further information and support will be available from the safety and wellbeing team.

Activities involving hot work such as welding, flame cutting, use of blow lamps or portable grinding equipment can pose a serious fire hazard and need to be strictly controlled when carried out in areas near flammable/combustible materials. A permit system is likely to be appropriate and AS40 – Permits to Work will give further detail on the permits that will be of use, e.g. Hot Work Permits, Fire Alarm Permits and Roof Work Permits etc.

12.   Help for People with Special Needs (PEEP)

An emergency evacuation plan will have been established for each workplace. This plan is likely to need supplemented by a personal emergency evacuation plan for each individual that requires assistance to evacuate the workplace. Assistance is likely to be required where an individual has a:
- mobility impairment, which can limit speed of evacuation;
- hearing impairment, which can limit the response to an alarm;

- visual impairment, which can limit the ability to escape;
- learning difficulty, which can affect the response to an alarm.

GD16 – Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans provides specific guidance to managers on the matter of undertaking a PEEP. An online "log in to learn" course is also available for those needing to undertake such an assessment.

A PEEP is required for all employees and visitors that will need assistance to evacuate a workplace whether the impairment is permanent or temporary.

The Fire and Rescue Service expect the Responsible Person to have arranged a complete evacuation prior to the arrival of a fire appliance.

13.   Developing an Emergency Plan

Each establishment needs to have an appropriate emergency plan that should include:

- How people will be warned if they discover a fire;
- What staff, students or pupils should do if they discover a fire;
- How the evacuation of the premises should be carried out;
- Individual needs / risks relating to individuals (consider residents in care homes & pupils in schools etc);
- Identification and use of protected areas for horizontal evacuation;
- Procedures for a 'delayed evacuation' response;
- Where people should assemble after they have left the premises and procedures for checking whether the premises have been evacuated;
- Identification of key escape routes;
- How an evacuation will be managed at times outwith normal working hours;
- Arrangements for fighting fire;
- The duties and identity of staff who have specific responsibilities if there is a fire (e.g. fire wardens);
- Arrangements for the safe evacuation of people identified as being especially at risk, such as residents and others with disabilities, members of the public;
- Any machines/processes/appliances/power supplies that need to be stopped or isolated if there is a fire.

14.   Fire Signage

Each workplace needs to ensure that adequate fire signage exists within the property. This will be a combination of advisory notices, directional signage and prohibition notices.

Signage will be used to communicate important information about fire safety to the users of the workplace. The signs should be placed in a manner that supports the findings of the fire risk assessment.

IS43 – Fire Safety – Fire Extinguishers and IS28 - Fire Instructions to Staff will also provide information on the signage and information required by employees to minimise the risks from fire.

Examples of the types of signage that is expected to be present in each establishment can be found below.

a)   Directional Signage – should be visible from any point in a corridor and work area

b)   A fire doors within a property should display a sign similar to this

c) A fire action notice is required at regular intervals throughout the property in areas that will permit all building users to access the information.

d) Special areas (e.g. refuge areas or assembly points) need to be marked and if necessary directional signage erected to permit these special areas to be found.

e) Fire Fighting Equipment should also be indicated with some signage. This will not only highlight where it is, but also help highlighted when it is missing.

In any event signage used should use colours and symbols that demonstrate compliance with the Safety Signs and Signals Regulations.

15. Safety after a Fire

When a building is on fire, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have complete control of the inner cordon and will only hand it back to North Lanarkshire Council once the fire has been controlled and there is little to no chance of the fire re-ignition.

If Council employees are to enter the inner cordon then they will need to follow the health and safety directions issued by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (see appendix 1). Employees that might enter the area include:

- Building Control;
- Safety & Wellbeing team members;
- Designers;
- Property Maintenance Professionals;
- Service Managers/Directors and Chief Executive;
- Operational Staff from the building concerned.

After a fire and the property has been returned to Council control is imperative that the Head of Establishment ensures all necessary risk assessments have been completed/reviewed

The most obvious ones are as follows, but other will be necessary depending on the nature of the hazards present:

- General Risk Assessment for work activity linked to inspection of workplace;
- General Risk Assessment for work activities taking place in the property (if work is recommencing prior to repair/revamp);
- Fire Risk Assessment;
- COSHH Assessments;
- Asbestos Log Book and Management Plan;
- Legionella.

All fires (no matter what size) should be recorded on CIRIS to ensure necessary investigations and notifications can take place.

Management of a Fire Scene

Introduction

Should a fire occur within a Council property, the management of the fire scene will fall to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). Non emergency personnel will be prohibited from entering the area until it is deemed safe.

There may be occasions where the Fire and Rescue Service will invite representatives of the Council into the fire scene before the area is handed back to Council control.

Entering the Area

The inner cordon of a fire scene is the area immediately around the scene of the fire, and its size and nature is defined and controlled by the Senior Fire officer attending the incident.

The inner cordon is potentially hazardous and SFRS will operate stringent controls in relation to the work undertaken within the cordon. This may include restrictions on access.

The SFRS officer in charge has the overall responsibility for health and safety within the inner cordon

When requested to attend such incidents by SFRS, Council employees will only be allowed to enter the cordoned area when wearing a minimum level of personal protective equipment. This is likely to include:

- Head Protection (e.g. hard hat);
- Eye Protection (e.g. safety goggles with necessary rating for hazards present – this is likely to include dust and liquids);
- Ear Protection (e.g. ear plugs or ear defenders);
- Respiratory Protection (e.g. dust mask);
- Hand Protection (e.g. gloves capable of providing protection against rough and uneven surfaces, or chemicals that might be present);
- Foot Protection (e.g. safety boots with midsole protection);
- Coveralls;
- Other items noted as necessary by the officer in charge of the scene.

Managers will need to ensure they have access to such equipment before agreeing to team members entering the site.

Hand back of Fire Site

Once a site is handed back to Council control the head of establishment must ensure

suitable and sufficient risk assessments are in place and that all necessary information, instruction and training has been given to those employees or contractors that are to enter the area.

Risk Assessment guidance is available of CONNECT and AS4 – General Risk Assessment will give details on the risk assessment process.