

Inner Southern District of Greater London

The Coroner's Court
1 Tennis Street
London SE1 1YD

Her Honour Frances Kirkham CBE
Assistant Deputy Coroner

30 March 2013

Mr Brian Robinson CBE
Chairman
Fire Sector Federation
London Road
Moreton in Marsh
Gloucestershire GL56 0RH

Dear Mr Robinson

Lakanal House fire 3 July 2009

I write concerning the inquests into the tragic deaths of Catherine Hickman, Dayana Francisquini, Thais Francisquini, Felipe Francisquini Cervi, Helen Udoaka and Michelle Udoaka, who all died in a fire at Lakanal House, Camberwell, on 3 July 2009.

The jury brought in Narrative Verdicts in respect of each of the deceased.

I write to you pursuant to Rule 43 of the Coroners Rules (as amended) which provides:

“(1) Where

- (a) a coroner is holding an inquest into a person's death,
- (b) the evidence gives rise to a concern that circumstances creating a risk of other deaths will occur, or will continue to exist, in the future; and
- (c) in the coroner's opinion, action should be taken to prevent the occurrence or continuation of such circumstances, or to eliminate or reduce the risk of death created by such circumstances,

the coroner may report the circumstances to a person who the coroner believes may have power to take such action.”

Following these inquests I sent reports pursuant to Rule 43 to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and London Borough of Southwark (LBS).

Evidence adduced at these inquests indicated that fire brigades generally assume that compartmentation of individual flats or maisonettes in high rise residential buildings would prevent the spread of fire from one dwelling to others or to common parts. However, the

evidence also indicated that, particularly with older housing stock, compartmentation might be breached as a consequence of, for example, maintenance or refurbishment work undertaken by building owners or modification to individual dwellings undertaken by occupiers.

Evidence was also given that a fire risk assessor should inspect individual flats or maisonettes within a high rise residential building to be able to inspect any features which could be seen inside, but not outside, the flat or maisonette and which might indicate that compartmentation had been breached.

I understand that your Federation seeks to give voice to and exert influence in shaping future policy and strategy related to the UK fire sector. I also understand that the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council ("the Council") works within your Federation. My attention has been drawn to the Council's guides "Competency Criteria for Fire Risk Assessors", published on 21 November 2011, and "Choosing a Competent Fire Risk Assessor", published on 1 February 2013. These indicate that your Federation is able to offer guidance as to some aspects of fire risk assessment.

It appears that your Federation is well placed to shape policy, at a national level, relating to the scope of fire risk assessment, and in particular with regard to assessment of high rise residential buildings, and to offer guidance as to how assessments should be carried out. I trust that your Federation will consider whether it has a role in clarifying the scope of fire risk assessments and in offering further guidance as to training of fire risk assessors.

I therefore, pursuant to Rule 43(4)(b), enclose copies of my reports to DCLG and LBS and draw to your attention the recommendations set out in those reports concerning fire risk assessments to be undertaken pursuant to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Frances Kirkham