

UPDATED: 4 December 2020

RESPONSE TO QUERIES ABOUT THE N26 EVACUATION STRATEGY, RESOURCES, COSTS AND NEXT STEPS

We have received a number of questions about the changes to the fire strategy at Kaleidoscope House and other blocks in plot N26.

We will add to these questions as the situation progresses. We'll do all we can to help and get you the information you need.

Why are you undertaking an inspection process now?

The inspections are undertaken by façade engineers who present the findings of their inspection and 'desk top' survey to the fire engineers (Design Fire Consultants). The fire engineers review this information and check some of the construction drawings and relevant testing data and then write their report. We therefore receive the detailed feedback from the fire engineers at the end of the process.

This report highlighted some problems with the buildings and recommended a review of the 'stay put' policy and a fire risk assessment be carried out to review the fire strategy. EVML acted quickly on receipt of this report.

We were aware of concerns about one of the blocks (Chroma House) because the engineers had asked to re-inspect parts of the block. However, at that stage, the fire engineers had not completed their report and there was no recommendation for any interim measures at the time.

The fire engineers have been liaising with the fire brigade about their approach to the inspections.

Did you get a second opinion?

A senior partner and experienced fire engineer leads on the reports for East Village. The advice received from the fire engineer has been reviewed by EVML's technical advisors at Savills and EVML's fire risk assessor.

EVML discussed the approach and change to the 'stay put' policy with the fire brigade. The fire brigade has not provided anything in writing, and we would not expect them to.

Why was there no consultation?

EVML felt it was important to put in place the system as soon as possible and this was an approach which Triathlon supported. EVML is open to answering questions about the evacuation strategy and patrols and to evaluate these as appropriate. EVML has a duty of care to ensure that residents are safe, and to follow the advice of professional fire safety experts.

EVML advised Triathlon and Get Living of the need to implement the evacuation strategy and additional patrols. All parties agreed this should be put in place quickly. The decision was made by the Estate Director, Peter Anderson, and was supported by the EVML Board.

Why has a “waking watch” been employed?

The primary reason for staff to be present is to facilitate an immediate evacuation of the building in the event of a fire. Staff will be watching for any signs of fire and will identify any potential fire hazards such as obstructions of fire evacuation routes. Staff are in constant radio contact with the Team East Village security control room. In the event of a fire the security control room will call the emergency services. The additional staff have been trained to respond appropriately.

EVML’s Health and Safety Manager has been responsible for overseeing the introduction of these safety patrols.

What are the alternatives to this?

The additional staffing is a temporary measure. EVML has begun the process of specifying a technical solution by extending the fire alarm system into apartments. Their fire risk assessors are developing a specification, and alarm engineers have been briefed to be ready to price and program the works. We will keep everyone updated about this. Until we know more about the technical solution it is difficult to give an estimate of the time it may take to implement. A project manager/surveyor at Savills has been employed to oversee this work.

How were the additional staff recruited?

EVML has a long-standing relationship with Abbatt Property Recruitment who provide temporary staff for Team East Village. EVML has a procurement strategy and regularly review their arrangements with suppliers and market test for price and value.

EVML is not aware of any relationship between their fire risk assessors and Abbatt Property Recruitment or the individuals carrying out the additional patrols.

What Covid-19 Precautions are being taken?

EVML has risk assessed the role of the patrols and their impact. Additional PPE has been ordered for staff.

What will the additional staff do?

The operatives' primary task is alerting the residents to an evacuation. They will do this by knocking on each door, sounding their bull horns by each door, and declaring a fire. They will then lead occupants to Ribbons Walk.

They are split into two teams, one to patrol inside of the buildings and one for the exterior areas. Those on the exterior team are also present to assist with residents who have mobility issues.

Each operative is assigned to an individual building and patrol each floor to check them for combustible materials, hazards, signs of fire and ensure the fire doors are working correctly.

How are you checking for consistency?

On Thursday 19 November we introduced supervisors for the team. Each floor should be checked every 15 minutes, and the supervisors are there to ensure this is being carried out. We are also introducing a proof of presence system, which will involve each operative electronically 'checking in' on each floor. This is a time-check system that we will use to confirm these duties are being uniformly carried out.

What are the shift schedules/how are breaks covered?

The shifts are 7 to 7, with a day and a night team. Breaks and lunches are staggered throughout the day, with an additional operative covering these. When this additional operative is not covering breaks, they are assisting with the exterior checks.

Please can you marshals to close doors quietly?

Thank you for making us aware of this, we have notified the supervisors that this is an issue. A part of this problem may be that some of the fire door closers are a little too forceful. We are arranging some additional training for the operatives with regard to fire doors, and will couple this with asking our estate teams to attend to adjust doors where they are slamming.

Can the inspection staff wear lanyards so that we can easily identify them please?

We are looking into this with our fire marshal provider.

Are the marshals correctly equipped?

The supervisor has met with each of the teams members to ensure they have equipment in place and ready to use.

What should they staff and residents be doing in the case of an evacuation?

Residents should evacuate to Ribbons Walk. Operatives are trained to loudly knock-on doors and use their bull horns at each door as they move through the building in the event of evacuation. They will also repeat the phrase "FIRE, FIRE". The teams will not break down doors in the event of no response.

What should residents with impaired mobility or sensory difficulties do?

Some of our residents may require particular assistance for them to evacuate the buildings in the event of a fire alarm activation. These Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (or PEEPs) have been reviewed by our fire risk assessor and the relevant information have been shared with our security control team (who would oversee an evacuation and liaise with the London Fire Brigade),

our waking watch operatives, and is stored in the PIP boxes, which the fire brigade unlock upon attending a building for evacuation. We are not aware of any resident in the buildings with sensory difficulties.

If there are any alterations or changes to a resident's situation, or if a resident would like to notify us of any changes to their situation that may require them to need assistance with leaving the building, they should let their landlord know as soon as they can so we can arrange for a PEEP to be completed and their details added to our list.

How much is this going to cost?

The cost of the service is in the region of £100,000 per month. There are 206 apartments in the plot. EVML will shortly seek prices for the changes to the alarm system. Lockdown does not make it more expensive apart from the cost of additional PPE. There is a small cost associated with a 'proof of presence' monitoring system.

EVML will discuss with their legal advisors the process for claiming costs from the original developers. Should costs be passed on to Triathlon Homes, our Board will decide whether these costs will be passed on to residents.

It is the position of Triathlon Homes to ensure every option is explored to prevent leaseholders picking up costs as a result of defects in the external walls. Triathlon's legal advisors have been notified of the fire engineers reports. They will liaise with EVML's legal advisors.

How will this impact my insurance?

EVML has notified its insurance brokers of the change to the policy. The implementation of the additional patrols is regarded as a positive measure to mitigate risk. If there are any changes to the premium in relation to the fire engineers report, we will let you know.

We advise you check your contents insurance policy about whether you need to notify your insurers about the change.

Does this mean that N26 will get an EWS1 form?

EVML will not ask the engineers to produce the EWS1 form as we know the buildings will not pass at this time.

It is the intention of EVML to ensure that every tall block at East Village has an EWS1 form demonstrating the buildings meet government guidelines and do not require remedial work.

In order to meet this objective, EVML will put in place a programme of remedial work to address the issues with the cladding. The first stages of this will be in two parts including further technical assessment across the plot and liaison with the developer about their process for Building Control Approval including testing data and certification requirements.

It is too soon to say with certainty what the timeline will be. It is possible that EWS1 forms will not be available for 18 months. We will keep you informed and updated about this process and give you a better idea about the timetable when more technical feasibility studies are undertaken.

Some mortgage providers have indicated they will lend if an EWS1 recommends remedial work and there is a clear plan, costing and source of funding in place. We would help facilitate any moves when this information is in place.

Does this impact on the Building Safety Fund application?

EVML has registered the Triathlon Homes blocks for the Building Safety Fund and has employed Savills to lead on the technical aspects of building safety across East Village. Both Savills and EVML are in regular dialogue with the Ministry for Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG) and the GLA regarding government funding and the progress of works. Savills has asked the MHCLG for clarity about the additional information required to make a full application. Much of the technical information about the blocks has already been submitted to the MHCLG. Triathlon will continue to monitor the progress of the applications.

Please know, that Triathlon and EVML are working hard to ensure we do all we can to resolve the building defects and to restore the sense of security you have in your homes. We'll do this as quickly and efficiently as possible. Triathlon is also working hard to avoid the situation where leaseholders become liable for the costs related to defects including remediation and repair.