

## 25<sup>th</sup>

# ANNUAL FIRE SAFETY CONFERENCE

23 & 24 February 2023  
Armagh City Hotel

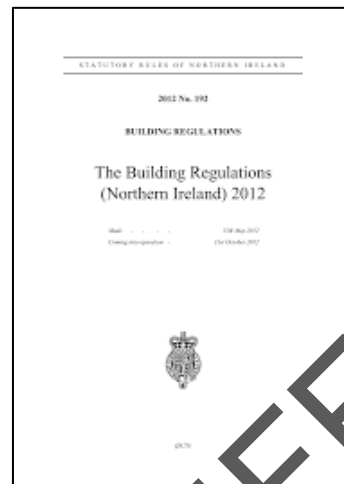
## “The changing face of fire safety”

Marking **50** years of the Building Regulations in  
Northern Ireland

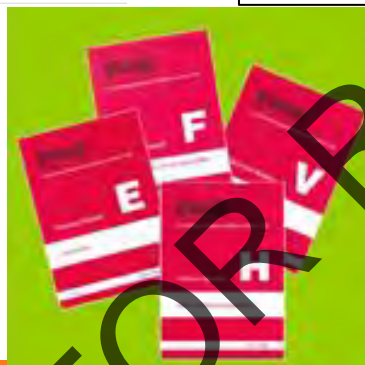
[www.buildingcontrol-ni.com](http://www.buildingcontrol-ni.com)

# Northern Ireland Building Safety Programme Update:

## Implications for Building Control



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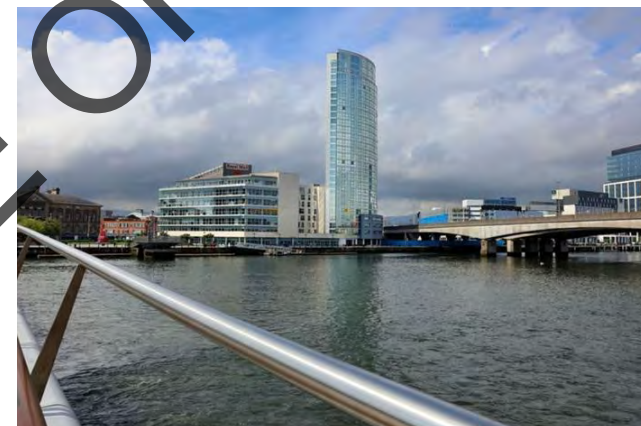


- A Review of Building Safety has commenced in NI;
- Building Control has a key role to play in ensuring the health safety and wellbeing of people in and about buildings;
- Significant change will be implemented;
- Building Control will be required to continue to provide a professional service throughout the change process.



## The scale of “in scope” in NI:

- Approx. 120 buildings over 18m;
- Approx. 265 over 11m;
- Majority Traditional construction;
- Remainder generally light weight cladding and over cladding.
- Majority of in scope buildings and applications are in the greater Belfast Area.
- Most Council areas in NI have very low numbers of existing in scope buildings
- Relatively low application numbers in respect of in scope buildings.



## Uncertainties

- **We don't know what a Building Safety Programme will look like in NI;**
- We do not know where and how Building Regulations administration and enforcement will sit and function within any system that is implemented in respect of in scope buildings.





# Fires don't stop happening even in high rise!

## Families rehoused after flat fire

A fire at a block of flats in north Belfast will mean some residents will have to be rehoused over Christmas.

The blaze started in a flat on the sixth floor of Ross House at Mount Vernon just after 0900 GMT on Sunday.

Fire officers believe it was started accidentally. A young family in the flat at the time escaped uninjured, and no-one in the building was hurt.

Firefighter Ken Leathem said those living above the sixth floor would have been at risk if the blaze had spread.

"Luckily enough, when the family left, they closed the door behind them so they took the right precautions, and that held the fire back," he said.

"The fire began to spread outside and up the side of the building as well - we were very concerned about that at the early stages.



The fire broke out in a flat on the sixth floor



Smoke could be seen billowing from the flat



## Belfast's Obel building: Fire was accidental

© 24 January 2015



Nine fire engines attended the scene at the Obel building in Belfast

## Fire hits high-rise flats in Dunmurry, near Belfast

© 15 November 2014



Flames and smoke hit multiple floors at Coolmoyne House



# Actions the Building Control profession can and should take now!



- Review who we are, what we do and how we do it;
- Recalibrate;
- Implement agreed changes and reposition our Profession in Construction in NI.





## Strengths:

- Experienced staff with extensive local knowledge;
- Archive of building information;
- Generally good relationships with Customers and a wide range of stakeholders;
- Strong values in delivering a quality and consistent service;
- Profession sits within Councils in NI with support structures in place;
- Record of high levels of compliance;
- Building Control is a totally impartial presence on building sites in NI.





# Weaknesses:

- No statutory body support;
- Growth of Functional Regulations;
- Each Council interprets Regulations within their particular Council area;
- Inconsistency in applying Regulations;
- Enforcement is Reactive;
- Much of individual Officers time is spent Lone Working;
- Recruitment and retention;
- No continuity planning
- Pressure on resources;
- Limited career development prospects within profession;
- No acknowledged professional qualification in Building Control in NI.



# Opportunities:

- Raise and promote the profile of the Building Control Profession;
- Justification for additional resources;
- Potential for specialism;
- Next generation of young professionals with passion for construction Engineering;
- Develop partnerships with other bodies.



# Threats:

- Current staff and financial resources;
- Lagging behind other devolved administrations;
- Functional regulations;
- Increasing scope of Regulations and Functions;
- Knowledge required;
- Staff changes and loss of experience;
- Amount of information which has to be communicated to stakeholders;
- Growing expectations of applicants and stakeholders





## Summary:

- A review of Building Safety has started in NI;
- Building Control is a critical component;
- We need to critically appraise the profession;
- We need to recalibrate and reposition ourselves as a key participant in whatever opportunities a Building Safety Program will provide;
- We need to lobby for adequate resources;
- We need to start now.



Thank You

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