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Date: 22nd June 2016

FAO: HM CORONER – MR. S. NELSON
HM CORONER'S OFFICE
PHOENIX CENTRE
CHURCH STREET
ROCHDALE
OL10 1LR
Private and Confidential

Dear Sir

Re: RBH RESPONSE IN REGARD TO REGULATION 28 OF THE INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF MISS EMMA WARING, [REDACTED]

I am writing as Chief Executive on behalf of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) in regard to the above Coroner's Inquest and the subsequent notification to the Department of Communities and Local Government made under Paragraph 7, Schedule 5 of the Coroner's Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroner's (Investigations) Regulations 2013 and dated 22nd September 2015.

We received a copy of the above report as an 'Interested Party' and although we were not required to respond directly regarding the Regulation, given the unfortunate circumstances of this tragic loss of life I felt it appropriate to offer some background information in relation the fire safety activities RBH undertakes both as a sole entity and also in partnership with other relevant agencies.

With specific regard to the installation of domestic sprinklers detailed in your recommendation, I am aware that the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) has on a number of occasions lobbied for such legislation and following a successful campaign led by Vale of Clwyd AM [REDACTED] to make domestic sprinklers compulsory in new and converted homes (including houses and flats) across Wales from 1st January 2016 onwards issued a position statement as recently as March 2013 to request that this be extended to cover the whole of the UK. At this present time, it is my understanding that the plans for UK wide legislation have not been taken forward.

However, despite the lack of such legislation RBH has delivered domestic sprinklers in several properties occupied by some of our most vulnerable tenants. The decision to install domestic sprinklers was based on a number of factors not least of which was a desire to maintain their quality of life whilst at the same time offering them the very best protection from fire that we could. These installations were approved by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service who were involved in the process from the outset and were installed by fully qualified sprinkler engineers. The sprinklers are connected to integrated smoke alarms which will only operate when a fire actually occurs and actuates a sprinkler head thereby significantly reducing the likelihood of false alarms. The system itself only requires an annual maintenance visit when the pressure and flow are tested meaning that from an occupier's perspective the system is effectively maintenance free.

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In addition, all RBH properties are fitted with hard-wired smoke detection in line with current legislation.

Although a number of our properties fall under the auspices of the FS(RRO)2005, the property in which Miss Waring was resident (and the vast majority of those we manage) was not covered by any enforceable fire safety legislation. We none the less take the issue of fire safety extremely seriously and, as such entered into a formal Service Level Agreement with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service in August 2013 for the joint provision of Safe & Well visits to all our tenants.

These visits are offered regardless of circumstance however, due to resource implications for both organisations they are presently targeted toward those considered to be most 'at risk' from fire due to their vulnerability in whatever regard that is evidenced. The visits are by self, RBH or partner agency referral and are undertaken by specific appointment chosen by the recipient themselves subsequent to which we jointly act upon any recommendations that are forthcoming including the potential onward referral to a number of partner agencies should additional support be identified. All visits and any actions taken by the agencies concerned are recorded by our Fire Safety Consultant who acts as our Single Point of Contact for this initiative and any personal information is shared in line with a formal Information Sharing Agreement with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service signed by both parties in December 2013 via a secure electronic system.

We are also currently working with Rochdale Council's Strategic Housing Service on a project designed to offer additional support to those identified as hoarders, an issue which has become more prevalent over recent years. The intention of the project is not only to ensure a consistent approach across all housing providers here in Rochdale but also to ensure that all RBH staff have the necessary support to deal with such issues as and when they are identified. The 'toolkit' is based on the internationally recognised 'Clutter Image Rating Scale' which is also used by several other partner agencies not only here in Rochdale but across Greater Manchester as a whole.

Regardless of all of the above, we will continue to seek new and innovative ways of delivering both our statutory fire safety duties and those which whilst not mandatory, we consider to be integral to our desire to be a housing provider of choice and to offer our tenants the best possible protection from fire. Although on occasion and despite our very best efforts tragic incidents such as that involving Miss Waring have the potential to occur, we are absolutely committed to continuous improvement and determined that any relevant lessons be learnt in our earnest attempts to ensure we do the very best that we can for all our tenants.

I sincerely hope that the above information will prove useful to the outcome of your inquest and assure you of our very best attention at all times.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Swarbrick', written over a horizontal line.

Gareth Swarbrick
Chief Executive