

Regulatory Services Case Study

LEICESTERSHIRE

FIRE and RESCUE SERVICE

safer communities

Businesses	Opal Court 60 Lancaster Road Leicester
Type	Student Rental Accommodation Hermes Asset Group SARL
Topic	Proactively aiding a business meet fire safety compliance standards and continue to trade through practical interim solutions and support
Date	Autumn 2015



Background

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is responsible for policing and enforcement of current fire safety legislation across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This includes premises provided as student accommodation, which regularly features as part of the annual inspection programme.

On the evening of the 13th October 2015, whilst attending a community safety event, crews from Central Station in Leicester, had some concerns regarding the fire alarm system at Opal Court. The premises provides accommodation for up to 655 students attending Leicester university and the Officer in Charge was concerned that parts of the alarm system were not operating correctly.

The matter was passed to the Fire Protection Department and an Inspector contacted Hugh Ard, the person responsible for the premises, and discovered that there was a fault on the automatic fire alarm system that required attention, but could not be repaired immediately.

It became clear that Mr Ard had taken steps to mitigate the risk from a fire occurring, over and above those normally expected, but the Fire Protection Inspector believed that further measures were required. He discussed this with Mr Ard and informed him that the use of part of the building as sleeping accommodation, may have to be prohibited.

Issuing a Prohibition Notice would potentially displace up to 40 students and prove costly to the business, so the Inspector was keen to explore all alternative solutions.

A number of steps were identified to bolster those already in place and the Inspector calculated that if 50 basic battery operated smoke detectors could be installed as an interim solution, together with the measure already in place, then a prohibition would not be necessary.

Mr Ard began contacting local suppliers of smoke detectors, but could not secure the number deemed necessary for the premises to continue to operate.

Aiding the Business

The Inspector raised the possibility of using the local fire stations stock of detectors.

Discussions were had with all involved and it was agreed that the detectors would not only be made available, but that firefighters would fit detectors in identified areas. The only stipulation was that the cost of replacing the detectors used would be borne by the business and assurance was given to that effect.

Working Together

This kind of collaborative approach to resolving issues is one that is being used more frequently.

The potential to avoid prohibition or restriction has existed for a number of years with the use of interim measures and has been used to good effect. It provides for a short term solution, with both parties signing up to agreed actions to mitigate the potential for harm, avoiding premises being barred from use and the likely financial costs resulting.

The main difference with this case was the extent to which firefighters were used to install detectors. This is not unusual; however the number of detectors and the extent of work involved is greater than anything previous.

The advantages to this type of approach are:

- No disruption to students through displacement
- Assurance that student safety remains top priority
- Positive publicity for both business and Fire & Rescue Service
- Opportunities for Firefighters to be seen and promote the safety message
- Minimum cost to business in comparison to providing alternative accommodation for students

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service remain committed to helping business to comply with legislation and grow, while effectively tackling those who repeatedly fail to meet basic safety requirements.



“We have a strong relationship with partner regulators and business representatives and this is a great example of the positive approach Leicestershire Fire & Rescue take in supporting business. It is far more involved to explore, identify and implement acceptable alternative measures, as opposed to prohibition, but the benefits to business are significant”. .” – **Andy Galway, Head of Fire Protection, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service**

Opal Court Community Manager Hugh Ard was pleased that a prohibition notice had been avoided.

“We were caught out when a fault developed on our fire alarm panel and replacement parts would not be available for three days. Discussing the problem with the Watch Manager at our local station resulted in a visit from the Fire Protection Officers. They assessed the risk and concluded they could not permit residents

to sleep in Opal Court without fire detection in their rooms. Faced with the prospect of having to re-house forty people in hotels at 10.30 at night, we were relieved when LFRS saved the day by providing and installing sufficient battery operated smoke detectors. The other stipulation to double up on security patrols to fire watch was soon arranged and everyone continued living in their own rooms with minimal disruption until the panel was repaired on schedule. Prior to this we thought we had taken all precautions, but this experience has taught us to think outside the box and try to be better prepared for the unexpected. I was most impressed by the positive attitude of the Fire Protection Officers who could have chosen to exercise their authority in a more dogmatic and less helpful way.” – **Hugh Ard, Community Manager, Opal Court**

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service is proud of its work with business and keen to maintain this supportive approach provided public safety is in no way compromised.