

Chris Kenny QFSM MA MSc CEng
Chief Fire Officer



TO: All Lancashire MPs
(hard copy of letter to follow)

Please ask for: Chris Kenny
Telephone: 01772 866800
Email: chriskenny@lancsfireandrescue.org.uk
Your Ref:
Our Ref: CK/HLG
Date: 31 October 2016

Dear MP

EARLY DAY MOTION 468 - SCRAPPING SCHOOL SPRINKLERS

Link to the Early Day Motion 468: <https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2016-17/468>

I am writing on behalf of Lancashire Combined Fire Authority as we have been notified of an Early Day Motion currently seeking support in the House of Commons with regard to *Building Bulletin 100: design for fire safety in schools* and the removal of the expectation that automatic fire suppression systems (sprinklers) will be fitted to all but the lowest risk new schools. We consider that such a move could compromise the safety of children, staff, local communities and firefighters.

Sadly, on average, each year in the UK, there are over 1,500 fires in schools and other educational premises (equivalent to four a day).¹ Only last month we saw the devastating fires at Selsey Academy, Sussex (which displaced 400 pupils for over a month) and Cecil Jones Academy in Southend-on-Sea. **Here in Leyland Lancashire in 2013 a major school fire resulted in parts of St Mary's Catholic Technology College being demolished after a blaze. This school fire caused £15m damage and closed the school for a month.**

Arson continues to be a major issue with around 40% of all school fires being started deliberately.² In the UK around 20 schools are the target of an arson attack each week.³ A third of these fires happen during school hours.

The average cost of a large school fire in 2014 was approximately £2.8 million and this is increasing year on year.⁴ As well as the financial loss, school fires disrupt the education of an estimated 90,000 children/students each year.⁵ Many governors, head teachers, staff as well as pupils, parents and the local communities suffer the trauma of seeing their schools burnt to the ground. In many cases that school building is lost forever. **In view of the significant losses incurred as a result of a fire, it is strongly recommended that sprinkler systems are installed as part of any plans to build new schools and redevelop existing school sites.**

¹ Local Government Association (LGA)

² Fire Protection Association/RISC Authority Large Loss Fire database (2014)

³ Association of British Insurers

⁴ Fire Protection Association/RISC Authority Large Loss Fire database (2014)

⁵ Zurich Municipal

Any cost benefit analysis, specifically covering the provision of sprinklers in schools would be likely to come out in favour of fitting them, especially given the additional design freedoms and other benefits that sprinklers can bring, such as:

- potential reductions in cost of structural fire protection
- potential reductions in insurance premiums
- flexible learning spaces/group work areas
- transformational teaching and learning environments
- protection against accidental fires (such those which may be caused by contractors undertaking hot work).

The provision of an effective sprinkler system would also benefit a school in terms of increased protection during evacuation, business continuity, sustainability, environmental impact, the risk to fire fighters/occupants and the impact on the wider community.

Nationally, sprinklers have helped save 17 schools from major fire damage in the past five years.⁶ The Glasgow School of Art suffered a devastating fire in 2014 which saw the Mackintosh building being severely damaged along with students' degree coursework. In May this year there was another fire in the Reid Building which fortunately was extinguished by sprinklers.

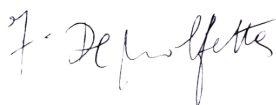
The Chief Fire Officers Association's Business Case for Sprinklers (2013) estimated that fitting sprinklers in a new school would amount to approximately 1-2% of the total build costs. However, there is potential for full cost recovery in 7-10 years due to reduced insurance premiums.⁷

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority is consulted as a matter of course during the building regulations submission stage of any new school building/redevelopment proposal. It is our policy to recommend the installation of sprinklers.

We have a statutory duty to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 once premises are occupied. The provision of a sprinkler system can potentially reduce the regulatory burden on the Responsible Person as such premises would be likely to achieve a lower risk rating in terms of achieving legislative compliance as well as ongoing fire safety management.

We would ask you to support this Early Day Motion in order to highlight to the Government the important role of sprinklers in providing a cost effective tool for further improving fire safety in your constituency. You can help improve fire safety in your community by asking Government to re-examine the evidence supporting the installation of sprinklers in schools and support further proposals to encourage their adoption including reinstating the vital requirements in BB100 recommending sprinklers forthwith.

Yours sincerely



Frank de Molfetta - Chair of Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
Chris Kenny - Chief Fire Officer

⁶ National Fire Sprinkler Network (2010-15)

⁷ LGA – Automatic Fire Sprinklers (Toolkit for Schools) 2004. Association of British Insurers.