

# **People Select Committee**

## **Scrutiny Review of Carbon Monoxide Awareness**

**Final Report**  
**July 2021**

People Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
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## **Select Committee – Membership**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Select Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

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## Foreword

On behalf of the People Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report following the scrutiny review of Carbon Monoxide Awareness.

This review was conducted to provide a greater understanding of the work of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and external organisations in raising awareness about carbon monoxide poisoning. The review also allowed Members to highlight and promote carbon monoxide awareness.

The Committee's considered view was that legislation should be extended to ensure that CO alarms are fitted in all properties, including holiday homes, for gas and solid burning fuel appliances. The Committee also supported the continuation of awareness raising through existing platforms. Both findings are reflected in the recommendations.

We would like to thank all those involved during the scrutiny review. This includes Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Officers, the North East Ambulance Service, and Cleveland Fire Service. The People Select Committee would also like to extend our thanks to Accent Housing Group, North Star Housing Group and Thirteen Housing Group for their contributions.



**Cllr Marilyn Surtees**  
**Chair**



**Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell**  
**Vice Chair**

## Original Brief

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2019-22 themes and objectives:  
Health and Wellbeing

Key objective: All people in the Borough live well and live longer.

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

This silent killer gas claims perhaps 30 lives every year in the country. What people do not know is that if a person is exposed to a lower dose then it will not kill them, but it will give them serious long-term health conditions. It attacks the central nervous system and can lead to paralysis, aches and pains, neuralgia etc. Many chronic conditions may in fact be the result of poisoning that has gone undetected but give the appearance of being something else.

The gas comes not just from gas boilers, but from anything that creates carbon when it burns. That includes wood and coal fires, barbeques, Calor gas, paraffin heaters etc. The best way to prevent it is to have these regularly serviced and flues swept. It tends to be people in poverty who don't prioritise that.

The aim of this review would be to provide a greater understanding of the work of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and external organisations in raising awareness about carbon monoxide poisoning.

### **The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- What work do Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) do to encourage people to have Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors in their homes?
- Does SBC participate in CO awareness month each year?
- What do SBC partners in Registered Social Landlords (RSL) do? For instance, do their operatives carry detectors when they go into tenants' homes for instance?
- Do ambulance staff routinely check patients who have a rosy complexion when they pick them up?
- Does SBC encourage RSL and private landlords to install CO alarms in all their properties?

- Does the fire service give out detectors?
- Is there more SBC can do?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

This issue has a direct impact on health and wellbeing. The Council has a role to play in monitoring private landlords/ tenancies etc.

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

1.1 The main aim of the review was to gain a wider understanding of the Council's role in raising awareness of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning and the installation of CO alarms. In addition, external organisations, including local registered providers of social housing, were invited to submit evidence on their actions in relation to CO awareness.

1.2 Members considered a range of evidence on the causes and consequences of CO poisoning and preventative measures. This review has provided the Committee with the opportunity to highlight and promote CO awareness.

1.3 The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas. Its lack of taste and smell can mean a person can become seriously ill before they realise that they have been poisoned by the gas.
- Symptoms of CO poisoning can be likened to flu-like symptoms and can be another reason that poisoning is not detected straight away.
- Advice on how to prevent CO poisoning through the installation of CO alarms was presented to the Committee. Advice on what to do if an individual suspects there has been a CO leak in their property was also included in this review.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team worked with local landlords to raise awareness of CO poisoning and to ensure that landlords adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.
- Notices could be served to private landlords if carbon monoxide alarms were not fitted, or unfit appliances were not replaced, within specific timeframes.
- Representatives from several local registered providers of social housing explained the various methods employed to comply with regulations and their methods of informing tenants about the dangers of CO poisoning to tenants.
- The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) provided information on staff training in CO poisoning awareness and treatment of those affected by CO poisoning.
- Cleveland Fire Brigade provided evidence on the support and advice provided to residents as part of their 'Safer Homes' initiative.

- Members reviewed all the evidence submitted and concluded that legislation should be extended to make it a requirement that CO alarms are installed in all properties, including all types of holiday homes.
- Members also suggested that legislation should be extended to include gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances.
- It was agreed that registered providers should be encouraged to continue to follow best practice and continue to raise awareness of CO poisoning to their tenants.
- The availability of mobile 'mini-detectors' was raised as an option for consideration for those who visit properties as part of their job role.
- Highlighting CO awareness could be publicised, in partnership with Cleveland Fire Service, through existing platforms, especially during the annual Carbon Monoxide Awareness week.

## **Conclusion**

1.4 Carbon Monoxide poisoning is a serious issue and one that could affect all residents across the borough. Poisoning can result from faults with gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. The installation of a Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms in the vicinity of such appliances is one preventative measure to reduce the risk of CO poisoning. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team engage in awareness raising of this issue and this includes working with local landlords to adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.

1.5 The Committee concluded that legislation should be extended to ensure that CO alarms are fitted in all properties, including holiday homes, for gas and solid burning fuel appliances. The Committee also supported the continuation of awareness raising through existing platforms.

## Recommendations

### 1.6 The Committee recommend:

1. That correspondence is sent to local MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government urging that legislation is extended to make it a requirement that carbon monoxide alarms are fitted in all properties, and public buildings, such as Community Halls, for gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. In addition to this, legislation should be extended to make the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in all forms of holiday home, including caravans, with gas and solid fuel burning appliances a legal requirement.
2. That, working with Cleveland Fire Service, information on Carbon Monoxide poisoning be publicised through existing platforms, including Stockton News and through work with schools, to raise awareness as part of carbon monoxide awareness week, including the promotion of mobile 'mini-detectors'.
3. That all Housing Associations are encouraged to follow best practice and to consider using body worn 'mini-detectors' where appropriate when entering other people's homes/dwellings. In addition, the promotion of body worn 'mini-detectors' to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council employees who regularly enter other people's homes/dwellings, such as registered carers.

## **2.0 Introduction**

2.1. This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Carbon Monoxide Awareness.

2.2 The main aim of the review was to gain a wider understanding of the Council's role in raising awareness of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning and the installation of CO alarms. In addition, external organisations, including local registered providers of social housing, were invited to submit evidence on their actions in relation to CO awareness.

2.3 Members considered a range of evidence on the causes and consequences of CO poisoning and preventative measures. This review has provided the Committee with the opportunity to highlight and promote CO awareness.

2.4 The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- What work do Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) do to encourage people to have Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors in their homes?
- Does SBC participate in CO awareness month each year?
- What do SBC partners in Registered Social Landlords (RSL) do? For instance, do their operatives carry detectors when they go into tenants' homes for instance?
- Do ambulance staff routinely check patients who have a rosy complexion when they pick them up?
- Does SBC encourage RSL and private landlords to install CO alarms in all their properties?
- Does the fire service give out detectors?
- Is there more SBC can do?

2.5 The Committee has taken evidence from Council Officers, Cleveland Fire Service, North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), Accent Housing, North Star Housing, Thirteen Housing Group.

### **3.0 Background**

3.1. This silent killer gas claims perhaps 30 lives every year in the country. What people do not know is that if a person is exposed to a lower dose then it will not kill them, but it will give them serious long-term health conditions. It attacks the central nervous system and can lead to paralysis, aches and pains, neuralgia etc. Many chronic conditions may in fact be the result of poisoning that has gone undetected but give the appearance of being something else.

3.2. The gas comes not just from gas boilers, but from anything that creates carbon when it burns so that includes wood and coal fires, barbecues, Calor gas, paraffin heaters etc. The best way to prevent it is to have these regularly serviced and flues swept. It tends to be people in poverty who don't prioritise that.

3.3. According to HETAS (Heating Equipment Testing & Approvals Scheme): "Carbon monoxide (CO) is a toxic gas produced by poor combustion. Faulty combustion appliances including gas, oil, & solid fuel can emit CO, usually accompanied by smoke in a solid fuel appliance. In some conditions this can be tasteless & odourless."

3.4. The NHS website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) states that 'every year there are around 60 deaths from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning in England and Wales.'

## 4.0 Evidence

### How to Act

4.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advises that a person take the following actions if they suspect an appliance is leaking carbon monoxide:

- Call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999
- Switch off the appliance and shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve
- Open all doors and windows to ventilate the room
- Visit your GP and tell him/her that you believe you may have been exposed to carbon monoxide

### Further information on Carbon Monoxide Awareness

4.2 HETAS has also produced a consumer advice leaflet entitled 'Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide', which is available to download and print from: [COconsumer220118DIGITAL.pdf \(hetas.co.uk\)](#)

4.3 The Gas Safety Register run an annual Gas Safety Week: [About Gas Safety Week - Gas Safety Week \(gassaferegister.co.uk\)](#)

4.4 Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week also takes place annually in November.

### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning – Information from NHS.UK

4.5 Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that has no smell or taste. Breathing it in can make a person unwell, and it can kill if an individual is exposed to high levels.

#### Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

4.6 The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are not always obvious, particularly during low-level exposure. A tension-type headache is the most common symptom of mild carbon monoxide poisoning. Other symptoms include:

- dizziness
- feeling and being sick
- tiredness and confusion
- stomach pain
- shortness of breath and difficulty breathing

4.7 The symptoms of exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide can be similar to those of food poisoning and flu. But unlike flu, carbon monoxide poisoning does not cause a high temperature. The symptoms can gradually

get worse with prolonged exposure to carbon monoxide, leading to a delay in diagnosis.

4.8 Symptoms may be less severe when away from the source of the carbon monoxide. If this is the case, the individual should investigate the possibility of a carbon monoxide leak and ask a suitably qualified professional to check any appliances they think may be faulty and leaking gas.

4.9 The longer a person inhales the gas, the worse their symptoms will be. They may lose balance, vision and memory and, eventually, they may lose consciousness. This can happen within two hours if there's a lot of carbon monoxide in the air.

4.10 Long-term exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide can also lead to neurological symptoms, such as:

- difficulty thinking or concentrating
- frequent emotional changes – for example, becoming easily irritated, depressed, or
- making impulsive or irrational decisions

4.11 Breathing in high levels of carbon monoxide gas can cause more severe symptoms. These may include:

- impaired mental state and personality changes (intoxication)
- the feeling that you or the environment around you is spinning (vertigo)
- loss of physical co-ordination caused by underlying damage to the brain and nervous system (ataxia)
- breathlessness and a heart rate of more than 100 beats per minute (tachycardia)
- chest pain caused by angina or a heart attack
- an uncontrollable burst of electrical activity in the brain that causes muscle spasms (seizures)
- loss of consciousness – in cases where there are very high levels of carbon monoxide, death may occur within minutes

### **What causes carbon monoxide to leak?**

4.12 Carbon monoxide is produced when fuels such as gas, oil, coal and wood do not burn fully. Burning charcoal, running cars and the smoke from cigarettes also produce carbon monoxide gas. Gas, oil, coal and wood are sources of fuel used in many household appliances, including:

- boilers
- gas fires
- central heating systems
- water heaters
- cookers
- open fires

4.13 Incorrectly installed, poorly maintained or poorly ventilated household appliances, such as cookers, heaters and central heating boilers, are the most common causes of accidental exposure to carbon monoxide.

4.14 The risk of exposure to carbon monoxide from portable devices may also be higher in caravans, boats and mobile homes.

4.15 Other possible causes of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- blocked flues and chimneys – this can stop carbon monoxide escaping, allowing it to reach dangerous levels
- burning fuel in an enclosed or unventilated space – for example, running a car engine, petrol-powered generator or barbecue inside a garage, or a faulty boiler in an enclosed kitchen
- faulty or blocked car exhausts – a leak or blockage in the exhaust pipe, such as after heavy snowfall, could lead to a build-up of carbon monoxide
- paint fumes – some cleaning fluids and paint removers contain methylene chloride (dichloromethane); this substance is broken down by the body into carbon monoxide
- smoking shisha pipes indoors – shisha pipes burn charcoal and tobacco, which can lead to a build-up of carbon monoxide in enclosed or unventilated rooms

### **Treating carbon monoxide poisoning**

4.16 Any individual should go to the local A&E straight away if they think they have been exposed to high levels. Symptoms will often indicate whether the person has carbon monoxide poisoning, but a blood test will confirm the amount of carboxyhaemoglobin in their blood. A level of 30% indicates severe exposure.

4.17 People who smoke can often have higher than normal levels of carboxyhaemoglobin in their blood, which can sometimes make it difficult to interpret the results.

4.18 Mild carbon monoxide poisoning does not usually need hospital treatment, but it's still important that medical advice is sought.

4.19 The individual's house will also need to be checked for safety before anyone returns.

### **Recovery**

4.20 The length of time it takes to recover from carbon monoxide poisoning will depend on how much carbon monoxide a person has been exposed to and how long they have been exposed to it.

### **Complications of carbon monoxide poisoning**

4.21 Prolonged significant exposure to carbon monoxide can cause serious complications, including brain damage and heart problems. In very severe cases, it can result in death. Effects of severe carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- breathlessness
- chest pains
- fits (seizures)
- loss of consciousness

4.22 Around 10 to 15% of people who have severe carbon monoxide poisoning develop long-term complications.

### **Brain damage**

4.23 Prolonged exposure to carbon monoxide can cause memory problems and difficulty concentrating. It can also cause vision loss and hearing loss. In rare cases, severe carbon monoxide poisoning can cause Parkinsonism, which is characterised by tremors, stiffness and slow movement. Parkinsonism is not the same as Parkinson's disease, which is a degenerative neurological condition linked to ageing.

### **Heart Disease**

4.24 Coronary heart disease is another serious condition that can develop as a result of long-term carbon monoxide exposure. Coronary heart disease is where the heart's blood supply is blocked or interrupted by a build-up of fatty substances (atheroma) in the coronary arteries. If the blood supply is restricted, it can cause angina (chest pains). If the coronary arteries become completely blocked, it can cause a heart attack.

### **Harm to unborn babies**

4.25 Long-term exposure to carbon monoxide gas can also damage an unborn baby. Babies exposed to carbon monoxide during pregnancy are at risk of:

- a low birth weight
- perinatal death (stillbirth) and death that occurs within the first 4 weeks of birth)
- behavioural problems

### **At-risk groups**

4.26 Carbon monoxide is a danger to everyone, but certain groups are more vulnerable than others. These include: babies and young children, pregnant women, people with chronic heart disease and people with respiratory problems, such as asthma.

4.27 Pets are often the first to show signs of carbon monoxide poisoning. The smaller an animal or a person is, the faster they'll be affected. People are advised to investigate the possibility of a carbon monoxide leak if a pet suddenly becomes ill or dies unexpectedly and their death is not related to old age or an existing health condition.

### **Maintaining and servicing appliances**

4.28 Boilers, cookers, heating systems and appliances should be installed and regularly serviced by a reputable, registered engineer. People are advised not to attempt to install or service appliances themselves. Anyone carrying out work on installations and appliances in a person's home must be registered with a relevant association, such as the:

- Gas Safe Register (for gas appliances)
- Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme (HETAS) (for solid fuel appliances)
- Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) (for oil appliances)

### **Maintaining chimneys and flues**

4.29 People are advised to make sure all chimneys and flues are swept regularly by a qualified sweep who's a member of the:

- National Association of Chimney Sweeps (NACS)
- Guild of Master Chimney Sweeps
- Association of Professional Independent Chimney Sweeps (APICS)

### **Engine exhaust fumes**

4.30 People can protect themselves from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by exhaust fumes in the following ways: do not leave petrol-fuelled lawnmowers or cars running in the garage and make sure the car's exhaust is checked every year for leaks. Also, make sure the exhaust is not blocked before turning the engine on (for example, after heavy snowfall).

### **Carbon monoxide alarms**

4.31 Installing a carbon monoxide alarm in a home will alert individuals if there's a carbon monoxide leak. But an alarm is not a substitute for maintaining and regularly servicing household appliances.

4.32 Carbon monoxide alarms can be purchased from a DIY or hardware store. People are advised to ensure that the alarm is approved to the latest British or European Standard (BS Kitemark or EN50291).

### **Other safety tips at home and in the workplace**

4.33 Members of the public are advised to follow the safety tips below to help protect themselves at home and in the workplace:

- Never use ovens or gas ranges to heat homes.
- Never use oversized pots on gas stoves or place foil around the burners.
- Make sure rooms are well ventilated and do not block air vents. If a home is double glazed or draught proofed, people are advised to make sure there's still enough air circulating for any heaters that are in the room.
- Do not use gas-powered equipment and tools inside a home if it can be avoided. Only use them in a well-ventilated area and put the engine unit and exhaust outside.
- Always wear a safety mask when using chemicals that contain methylene chloride.
- Do not burn charcoal in an enclosed space, such as on an indoor barbecue.
- Do not sleep in a room that has an unflued gas fire or paraffin heater.
- Fit an extractor fan in a kitchen (if it does not already have one).

#### **Being aware of the signs**

4.34 It's very important to be aware of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and to look out for warning signs. Carbon monoxide poisoning should be suspected if other people in the house, flat or workplace fall ill with similar symptoms. If symptoms disappear when a person goes away (for example, on holiday) and return when they come back. If symptoms tend to be seasonal – for example, if an individual get headaches more often during the winter, when the central heating is used more frequently. If pets also become ill.

4.35 Other possible clues of a carbon monoxide leak include:

- black, sooty marks on the front covers of gas fires
- sooty or yellow/brown stains on or around boilers, stoves or fires
- smoke building up in rooms because of a faulty flue
- yellow instead of blue flames coming from gas appliances
- pilot lights frequently blowing out

#### **North East Ambulance Service (NEAS)**

4.36 In April 2021, a representative from North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), spoke to the Committee and answered Members' questions.

4.37 Training for operational staff in carbon monoxide awareness is included in training around poisons and overdose and would include:

- The death rates compared to other toxins
- Accidental vs suicide
- Affects and physiology
- Diagnosis and difficulties around this

- What to look for
- Symptoms
- Management
- Treatment

4.38 NEAS did not routinely carry probes in ambulances to measure for carbon monoxide poisoning as staff were normally called to incidents once a person had become seriously unwell. However, routine tests carried out on patients would uncover if an individual was suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Staff were trained to recognise the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and to be aware that an individual may be suffering from the non-specific symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

4.39 The increase in the installation of smoke detectors across all types of properties and buildings had resulted in a decrease in casualties. Legislation to also make carbon monoxide a standard requirement could also have the same effect.

#### **Cleveland Fire Service**

4.39 Cleveland Fire Brigade provide advice and support on Fire Safety in the home. The Community Safety Hub staff have general knowledge of carbon monoxide and the advice hub staff give is targeted as part of the safer homes visit within people's homes. Free smoke alarms are provided at part of a safer home visit, if needed, but free carbon monoxide detectors are not provided.

4.40 Operational crews carry out home fire safety visits, which are completely free. The visits focus on three key areas:

1. Identify and be aware of the potential fire risks within your home
2. Know what to do in order to reduce or prevent these risks
3. Put together an escape plan in case a fire does break out and ensure you have working smoke alarms

4.41 Although Carbon Monoxide alarms are not provided, crews or advocates advise on the dangers of carbon monoxide and what the effects are to the occupant.

4.42 Occupants are always advised of these dangers and urged to purchase a Carbon monoxide alarm from places such as Tesco, B+Q, Asda. An ideal location is also suggested to place these alarms in their homes.

4.43 Residents who wish to book one of these visits can call 01429 874063 or complete the form below:

[Home Fire Safety Referral Form \(pdf\)](#)

#### **The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015**

4.44 From 1 October 2015, new regulations require private sector landlords to have at least one working smoke alarm installed on every storey of their

rental property. Where there's a solid fuel appliance, they are also required to have a carbon monoxide alarm installed in the room in which it is used.

4.45 Landlords must make sure that there are adequate working alarms at the start of each new tenancy.

4.46 In January and April 2021, the roles of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team in raising awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning were outlined. This included work with local landlords and enforcing legal requirements in privately rented properties.

4.47 SBC's Private Sector Housing Team staff are responsible for enforcing these regulations and are required to issue a notice to a landlord where they believe that a property does not have the required smoke and carbon monoxide alarms or are not repaired or replaced, within specific timeframes.

4.48 Contact details:

Website: <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-places/housing-services/private-rented-housing/>

E-mail: [privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk)

Tel: 01642 527797

4.49 If the landlord fails to comply with this notice, with the occupier's consent, appropriate alarms can be fitted in default of the notice. A fixed penalty notice of up to £5000 can also be issued where a notice has not been complied with.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarms-explanatory-booklet-for-landlords/the-smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarm-england-regulations-2015-qa-booklet-for-the-private-rented-sector-landlords-and-tenants>

4.50 Members were informed that one brand of carbon monoxide alarm is not preferable over another, but alarms needed to be certified and in date.

4.51 Looking after staff as well as residents was also a priority and Members were informed that consideration would be given to the purchasing of 'mini-detectors' to prevent exposure in potentially dangerous properties.

<b>Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998</b>
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4.52 Under this legislation social landlords must:

- *Ensure that gas fittings and flues are maintained in a safe condition*
- *A gas safety check is carried out annually on each appliance/flue*

However, it is important to note that this annual inspection is essentially a "gas safe MOT", and it will not guarantee tenant protection from carbon

monoxide between these timeframes. Only carbon monoxide alarms can provide this.<sup>1</sup>

## **Building Regulations Part J**

4.53 What this stipulates:

- *Carbon monoxide alarms must be installed in the room where a new or replacement fixed solid fuel appliance is installed in a dwelling*

4.54 However, this does exclude social housing premises that already have a fuel-burning appliance installed, which is somewhat alarming as older appliances are likely to pose a greater risk to tenants. In recognition of this, the 2015 report by the All-Party Parliamentary

4.55 Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) recommended that “Building Regulations should be amended to require social housing providers to fit and maintain standard compliant carbon monoxide alarms wherever a fuel burning appliance is installed.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Information from Registered Providers**

4.56 Four questions, based on guidance for best practice, were sent to local Housing providers, and written responses were submitted to the Committee as part of this review. The questions were:

- (1) How does your organisation Educate tenants about CO?
- (2) Have all fuel-burning appliances been regularly serviced by a gas safe engineer?
- (3) When and where are carbon monoxide alarms installed?
- (4) How are tenants informed on what to do in the event of a carbon monoxide event?

## **Accent Housing Group**

4.57 (1) How does your organisation Educate tenants about CO?

Extract from Accent Housing Website: “Unsafe gas appliances can leak lethal carbon monoxide gas. The gas can’t be seen and it has no smell. We supply carbon monoxide detectors. If they detect the poisonous gas, they sound an alarm. If you don’t have a detector, let us know and we will fit one with our next safety check. Even if you have a carbon monoxide detector, and your appliances are serviced regularly, if you feel ill, or you can smell gas, get fresh air immediately and call your doctor just to be on the safe side. Don’t use the

<sup>1</sup> Information sourced from [Social Housing CO Legislation \(England\) | FireAngel.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Information sourced from [Social Housing CO Legislation \(England\) | FireAngel.](#)

appliance you think is faulty and call us immediately if it is our appliance (or a Gas Safe registered engineer if the appliance is your own)."

We also support the annual gas safety week campaign run by the Gas Safe Register which we promote on our website and newsletters. Our first letter to customers requesting access for the annual gas safety check includes the following wording "Your Annual Gas Safety Check to include testing of smoke alarms, heat alarms and carbon monoxide detectors is due before DD/MM/YEAR. Accent Housing Limited have a legal responsibility under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations to inspect the gas appliances in your home every 12 months, even if you do not use them. We are also required under BS 5839 to carry out yearly tests to smoke and heat detectors. These safety checks and inspections are free of charge. It makes sure that the gas appliances in your home are safe and that all alarms and detectors are in working order."

4.58 (2) Have all fuel-burning appliances been regularly serviced by a gas safe engineer?

All properties with a gas supply are checked and serviced annually and/or on a change of tenancy.

4.59 (3) When and where are carbon monoxide alarms installed?

All properties with a gas supply have a carbon monoxide detector installed in any room where there is a fuel burning appliance.

4.60 (4) How are tenants informed on what to do in the event of a carbon monoxide event?

We have a process that is followed on any report of a gas leak or smoke/carbon monoxide detector activation.

Extract from Accent Housing website: "We must make sure any gas, oil and solid fuel appliances we provide in your home are safe and in good working order. By law, we must safety check these appliances every year. Our Gas Safe registered contractors will contact you when your safety check is due and make an appointment to call. You can change an appointment if it is not convenient, but you must allow access for the safety check. If you don't, you could be putting yourself and everyone around you in danger. We can't take that risk so, if we can't gain access to your home to carry out the safety check, we may have to go to court to gain access. We'd rather not do this so help us to help you by letting our contractors in to carry out the safety check when it is due. We are not responsible for the maintenance of any gas appliances you own, but we can't stress how important it is for you to arrange your own service every year. It could save your life. If you think you have a gas leak, turn off your gas at the meter, don't smoke, don't turn any light switches on or off and don't use any naked flames. Open all your doors and windows and get some fresh air circulating. Call the gas emergency number 0800 111 999. If

you're concerned that you've not had your annual gas safety test, and would like to know when your next test is due please [contact us](#)"

4.61 In April 2021, a representative from Accent Housing, spoke to the Committee and answered Members' questions.

4.62 Accent were currently considering the possibility of hardwiring carbon monoxide alarms in properties to prevent alarms from being moved from rooms or placed in unsuitable areas. Staff informed tenants of the importance of keeping alarms where they were supposed to be so they could detect carbon monoxide effectively.

### **North Star Housing Group**

4.63 (1) How does your organisation Educate tenants about CO?

As part of the annual gas service and 6 monthly solid fuel service our engineers will explain that a CO detector has been installed and what to do in the event that the alarm is activated. The instructions include opening all windows within the property, vacating the room when the alarm has been activated and calling our emergency repairs service so that the incident can be investigated and property made safe.

4.64 (2) Have all fuel-burning appliances been regularly serviced by a gas safe engineer?

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 100% of North Star properties which require one have an in-date (within the previous 12 months) Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) completed by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

As part of the LGSR, North Star carry out a five point visual safety check for gas cookers and service any other gas appliances (such as gas fires) within the property.

North Star also complete regular services to all solid fuel appliances. This service is completed by a HETAS registered engineer. This service includes the inspection and sweep of all chimney's linked to the solid fuel appliance. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 100% of properties which require on have received a solid fuel service within the last 12 months.

4.65 (3) When and where are carbon monoxide alarms installed?

North Star have installed carbon monoxide alarms in all rooms within domestic dwellings that contain an appliance which burns, or is capable of burning, a solid fuel. North Star have also installed carbon monoxide alarms in every room in which a gas boiler is located.

Carbon monoxide alarms are inspected as part of every gas and solid fuel service. Alarms will be replaced as part of the service if they are found to be faulty or missing.

4.66 (4)How are tenants informed on what to do in the event of a carbon monoxide event?

As part of the annual gas service and 6 monthly solid fuel service our engineers will explain that a CO detector has been installed and what to do in the event that the alarm is activated. The instructions include opening all windows within the property, vacating the room when the alarm has been activated and calling our emergency repairs service so that the incident can be investigated and property made safe.

4.67 In April 2021, a representative from North Star Housing, spoke to the Committee and answered Members' questions.

4.68 North Star ensured that contractors always talked to tenants about carbon monoxide alarms and what to do if an alarm sounded. North Star were looking into obtaining 'mini-detectors' for their contractors and staff entering tenant properties.

4.69 Increasing awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning would be promoted via social media and the company website.

### **Thirteen Housing Group**

4.70 (1) How does your organisation Educate tenants about CO?

We have gas safe week annually where we highlight the dangers of CO as part of the wider campaign. In addition, we have recently had the 'Test your CO and smoke alarm' campaign. We have regular updates on social media around the importance of getting your gas appliances checked / serviced to keep them safe and we are also planning on sending the gas leaflet (see as appendix 1) out with all gas service appointments.

Customers are continuously reminded about the importance of keeping their appointment in all follow-up letters to missed gas servicing visits.

The link to a Safety campaign we ran to remind customers to press to test button on the CO alarm can be found [here](#). This was covered on social media, website, colleague engagement via touchpoint and Channel (to raise awareness of the importance of reminding customers and knowing the procedure for reporting).

A copy of the poster accompanying the campaign is attached (see appendix 2) and here's the video link which was shared too <https://youtu.be/RUB1wZMsA4A>

4.71 (2) Have all fuel-burning appliances been regularly serviced by a gas safe engineer?

We carry out servicing on all fuel- burning appliance every 10 months. Thirteen group only have 3 properties with solid fuel within our stock and 10 log burners in our managed stock portfolio.

4.72 (3) When and where are carbon monoxide alarms installed?

We are in the process of commencing our annual programme for all stock to install and maintain CO alarms. It is not legislation to have these installed in Social Housing Properties at this moment in time, although there is a consultation out now which may see this become compulsory.

Where we do have CO alarms fitted (around 50% of the stock) the expiry date is checked and the test button pushed annually as part of the gas servicing programme. All new build properties will have a CO alarm installed as standard.

4.73 (4) How are tenants informed on what to do in the event of a carbon monoxide event?

Information was included in the recent CO and smoke alarm campaign and we always quote the gas emergency number. Information is also included in the annual gas servicing letters.

Thirteen Group have various publications and social media interactions with customers over the course of the year and if needed, the Gas servicing team will conduct a dedicated campaign using these mechanisms.

### **Members' Discussions**

4.74 In April 2021, as the review topic proposer, Cllr Louise Baldock was invited to speak about her personal experiences of carbon monoxide poisoning and raising awareness on this issue. Cllr Baldock highlighted the key lines of enquiry which had featured in her original suggestion and had been covered through this review. Members agreed that carbon monoxide poisoning was a serious issue and thanked Cllr Baldock for speaking to the Committee and for suggesting this topic.

4.75 Members questioned whether a universal price for carbon monoxide detectors could be introduced to ensure that more people were protected.

4.76 Members suggested that legislation should be passed to ensure that carbon monoxide alarms were fitted in all properties for gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. The increase in wood burning appliances in households and holiday homes was also raised as a concern. Members suggested that correspondence should be sent to local MPs about this issue and to encourage MPs to raise this issue in the Commons.

4.77 Members suggested that a feature in Stockton News could focus on carbon monoxide poisoning awareness to prevent further casualties. Information on carbon monoxide awareness could also be included at SBC Home Safety events.

4.78 Members suggested that carbon monoxide alarms should be installed in all forms of holiday home, including caravans. Members also suggested that members of the public could be encouraged to take their own carbon monoxide alarms away with them on holiday as a safety measure.

4.79 'Mini-detectors' which could be placed on a person's clothing, such as a belt, were available to purchase. Members suggested that these detectors could be provided to staff and contractors when entering residential properties as part of their work. Members suggested that registered carers could take carbon monoxide alarms into the homes of older residents.

## **5.0 Key Findings and Conclusion**

### **Key Findings**

5.1 Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas. Its lack of taste and smell can mean a person can become seriously ill before they realise that they have been poisoned by the gas.

5.2 Symptoms of CO poisoning can be likened to flu-like symptoms and can be another reason that poisoning is not detected straight away.

5.3 Advice on how to prevent CO poisoning through the installation of CO alarms was presented to the Committee. Advice on what to do if an individual suspects there has been a CO leak in their property was also included in this review.

5.4 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team worked with local landlords to raise awareness of CO poisoning and to ensure that landlords adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.

5.5 Notices could be served to private landlords if carbon monoxide alarms were not fitted, or unfit appliances were not replaced, within specific timeframes.

5.6 Representatives from several local registered providers of social housing explained the various methods employed to comply with regulations and their methods of informing tenants about the dangers of CO poisoning to tenants.

5.7 The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) provided information on staff training in CO poisoning awareness and treatment of those affected by CO poisoning.

5.8 Cleveland Fire Brigade provided evidence on the support and advice provided to residents as part of their 'Safer Homes' initiative.

5.9 Members reviewed all the evidence submitted and concluded that legislation should be extended to make it a requirement that CO alarms are installed in all properties, including all types of holiday homes.

5.10 Members also suggested that legislation should be extended to include gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances.

5.11 It was agreed that registered providers should be encouraged to continue to follow best practice and continue to raise awareness of CO poisoning to their tenants.

5.12 The availability of mobile 'mini-detectors' was raised as an option for consideration for those who visit properties as part of their job role.

5.13 Highlighting CO awareness could be publicised, in partnership with Cleveland Fire Service, through existing platforms, especially during the annual Carbon Monoxide Awareness week.

## **Conclusion**

Carbon Monoxide poisoning is a serious issue and one that could affect all residents across the borough. Poisoning can result from faults with gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. The installation of a Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms in the vicinity of such appliances is one preventative measure to reduce the risk of CO poisoning. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team engage in awareness raising of this issue and this includes working with local landlords to adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.

The Committee concluded that legislation should be extended to ensure that CO alarms are fitted in all properties, including holiday homes, for gas and solid burning fuel appliances. The Committee also supported the continuation of awareness raising through existing platforms.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend:

1. That correspondence is sent to local MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government urging that legislation is extended to make it a requirement that carbon monoxide alarms are fitted in all properties, and public buildings, such as Community Halls, for gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. In addition to this, legislation should be extended to make the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in all forms of holiday home, including caravans, with gas and solid fuel burning appliances a legal requirement.
2. That, working with Cleveland Fire Service, information on Carbon Monoxide poisoning be publicised through existing platforms, including Stockton News and through work with schools, to raise awareness as part of carbon monoxide awareness week, including the promotion of mobile 'mini-detectors'.
3. That all Housing Associations are encouraged to follow best practice and to consider using body worn 'mini-detectors' where appropriate when entering other people's homes/dwellings. In addition, the promotion of body worn 'mini-detectors' to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council employees who regularly enter other people's homes/dwellings, such as registered carers.

## APPENDIX 1 – Thirteen Housing Group Gas Safety Leaflet



**thirteen**  
Managing and building homes

**Gas safety checks in your home**



**Keeping you and your family safe**

Ensuring that appliances such as gas fires and boilers are serviced, working correctly and efficiently and are safe, is essential.

Gas safety checks are a legal requirement, and they must be carried out every year. Poorly maintained gas appliances can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

If you miss an appointment, faulty appliances won't be identified and this could be dangerous, so please help us to help you, by ensuring our engineers can get the access they need.

Please be reassured that all of our engineers take the necessary steps to keep customers safe at all times.

**Contact us**

[www.thirteengroup.co.uk](http://www.thirteengroup.co.uk)  ThirteenGroup  
 @Thirteen\_Group  0300 111 1000

M0116658 Gas safety Leaflet A5.indd 1 24/02/2021 14:18

### Before your appointment

If you or a family member becomes unwell before we visit you, please contact us and we'll work with you to arrange a new appointment.



If we have your mobile number in our systems, we'll be able to let you know that we're on our way to your appointment, as you'll receive a text message when the engineer is on the way to your home. Please be prepared for your appointment and make sure the engineer can access all of your gas appliances and gas meter. Before we arrive at your home, where possible, please open windows and leave all internal doors in the property open to encourage ventilation.



### When we arrive

When the engineer arrives at your home, and you answer the door, please ask to see their ID card.



All of our engineers carry ID and they're Gas Safe Registered. They'll thoroughly clean their hands using their hand sanitiser before they step into your home and they'll be wearing the necessary PPE.

Published March 2021 in line with guidance at the time of publishing and subject to change.

### While we're in your home

Your gas safety check will only take around one hour. We'll check all gas appliances and your carbon monoxide and smoke alarm.



We'll clean down all surfaces before touching them, using antibacterial wipes. Please try not to move around the home while we're there. But if you need to at any time, please let us know, so we can ensure we can maintain social distancing.

### Keep your distance

Please remain at least two metres away from our engineers at all times and where possible step into a separate room.



### After your appointment

When our engineers have completed the work at your home, they'll sanitise their hands and the area they've been working in and let you know they're leaving the property. You'll receive a copy of the gas safety certificate in the post and we'll let you know if any further work needs doing.

### Thank you

Thank you for working with us to help keep you and your family safe.





Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Big plans, bright future

## APPENDIX 2 - Thirteen Housing Group Smoke Alarm Poster

