



Date: 2 May 2025

Orbit
PO Box 6406
Coventry
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Dear Customer,

Responding to your questions about Compass House

Having recently joined Orbit as Interim Director of Property Improvements, I'd been made aware of concerns raised by residents at Compass House which have been sent direct to Orbit Chief Executive Officer, Phil Andrew. Both Phil and I are very sorry that you've been experiencing issues and that you've not always received a clear response from us on these important matters.

I visited Compass House on Wednesday 16 and Wednesday 30 April 2025 to listen to residents and get a better understanding of your concerns. I want to reassure you that I'm committed to resolving these and acting on your feedback – and I will ensure we keep in regular contact until you're satisfied with our response.

As we've previously confirmed, Tamzin Slade has joined our team at Compass House. Tamzin is supporting your Property Manager, Leah Thompson, to get things done and keep you better informed on the issues that matter to you. Tamzin will continue to email you on a weekly basis with progress on the action plan.

In this letter, I've summarised the actions I've taken away from my visits. I've also provided answers to the questions you've raised. In some instances, you'll see I'm waiting for additional information so that I can provide a full response. Where this is the case, I'll ensure further detail is shared with you as soon as possible.

My actions

- Arrange a regular fortnightly drop-in for customers at Compass House. The next drop-in is planned for 14 May 2025, and these will then continue fortnightly
- Investigate any immediate changes to the alarm system that can be made to reduce the number of false alarms and consider any alternative safety measures by 30 May 2025
- Review our approach to call outs for re-setting fire alarms to reduce the wait time. I aim to complete this review by 30 May 2025
- Share the outcomes of an assessment by an independent fire alarm specialist, including any recommendations to resolve the false alarms by 30 June 2025

- Work with the technical specialists to continue building our understanding and start the design brief for the longer-term works required. This initial phase is expected to take several months, and we aim to share more information with you in the autumn
- Meet with the Fire Service to ensure we're working in partnership and address concerns about the Fire Service not attending false alarms. I aim to do this by 16 May 2025, subject to the availability of the fire officers.

Answering your questions

What is Orbit's plan to reduce and eliminate the false fire alarm activations?

Firstly, we want you to know that we're sorry about the false alarms. We know these can cause a lot of worry and are annoying and inconvenient. We're currently making changes to the alarm system as we believe this will reduce the false activations. We're hopeful these changes will be implemented by Friday 9 May 2025, subject to us accessing four remaining homes.

We've also instructed an independent specialist to carry out an inspection of the fire detection and alarm system. Their report is expected by the end of June and will include recommendations for any remedial work or modifications required to reduce the number of false alarms. We'll share the outcomes of this with you as soon as we can.

How long will the temporary communal fire alarm system be in situ and what is Orbit's target date to remove it by?

The temporary alarm system will remain in place until remediation work at your building has been completed. I'm sorry we can't provide any timescales right now, but please be assured we're dedicated to putting in place a clear long-term plan for Compass House. We're currently working with external technical specialists to assess and plan the works required.

Why was the new communal system installed without the collaboration of East Sussex Fire & Rescue?

I can confirm we collaborated with the fire service, in fact, we have an obligation to do so under the Building Safety and Fire Safety Acts.

You've told me that the local Fire Service doesn't always arrive when the alarm is activated. I'm looking into this and planning to meet directly with them. I'll also update them on our current plans.

Why was the new communal system installed when the engineers who installed the system made it clear that the alarms fitted in each home are not designed to be used as a multi dwelling system, especially with no designated person on site to manage false activations?

We had to ensure that the system we installed met all the relevant regulations and standards. The independent assessment that is underway will further examine the suitability of the installation.



What is the exact extent of the fire compartmentation issues at Compass House and what parts of the building are affected by the fire compartmentation requirement that does not meet current fire safety regulations?

The Fire Risk Assessment recommended that we undertook a compartmentation survey. We're currently working with technical specialists to understand the outcomes of the compartmentation survey and any remedial work required. We've installed the fire alarm system in your homes as an additional safety measure until any necessary remedial work is complete.

If flats are affected, which flats are these and is this regarding the fire compartmentation between communal walls, floors, ceilings, etc.

You asked us to share the Fire Risk Assessment with you; however, we're unable to do this as it has many photographs from inside individual homes. We'll ask our fire risk assessors to produce a summary of the findings of the Fire Risk Assessment and we'll share this with you as soon as we can.

Why were we sold properties given the fire compartmentation issues?

The safety of our customers is always our priority. The construction of all new buildings must follow strict government regulations and building control measures in order to ensure they are built to a safe quality standard and to then be occupied as a home.

What certification has Orbit received to ensure the building remains safe to live in?

As we have reiterated, your safety is our upmost priority, and we take seriously our responsibility to act on the professional assessment and recommendations of the independent fire risk assessors. The recommendation was to install the fire alarm system as an additional safety measure. We consulted with the fire service on this and we'll receive the fire alarm certification once the system is fully commissioned.

What certification will leaseholders require to sell their properties?

The situation will not restrict you from selling your home, but you must inform the buyer through your solicitors of the current circumstances and any required remedial work. We can support you by providing relevant documentation and further information to solicitors if requested. Please contact us to discuss this by emailing PropertySafetyProjectsTeam@orbit.org.uk

What is Orbit's plan to financially compensate leaseholders for the negative impact on the resale value of their home, and difficulties in selling?

There are many factors which impact on the value of property. We're not aware of any significant fluctuations with local property prices. If you have any concerns about the sale of your home, please contact us to discuss this by emailing homeownership.services@orbit.org.uk or calling 0800 678 1221.



Will Orbit buy back homes from leaseholders at full market value where they request this intervention?

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What is the current length of time each flat is fire retardant, is this less than the minimum requirement of 30 minutes?

Where a 'Stay Put' strategy is in place, the Building Regulations require that each individual home has 60 minutes of fire protection. Our independent experts believe the wall and ceiling detail in your building mean that this timeframe would be less than 60 minutes.

Therefore, we've acted on the recommendations of the fire safety assessors to put additional safety measures in place and invested in the fire alarm system. We also worked closely with the fire service and they agree that changing the stay put policy to simultaneous evacuation is the right course of action.

What is the plan for those flats where there is no external fire escape or access to an external roof space?

The guidance for all residents is to follow the simultaneous evacuation procedure of leaving the building immediately and going to the fire evacuation point if it is safe to do so. When you've evacuated the building and are safe, please call 999.

What is the plan for residents who are immobile and unable to escape, given the lift is out of action when the fire alarm is activated?

Please let us know as soon as possible if you or any member of your household would not be able to evacuate using the stairs in the unlikely event of a fire, so we can discuss a Personal Emergency Action Plan with you, and make the fire service aware. Please email us at PropertySafetyProjectsTeam@orbit.org.uk.

Can we have a dedicated area on Orbit's website that we can access information like the one for St Anne's?

Yes. We will aim to have this live by the 30 May 2025.

I hope my responses give you clarity on your concerns and assurance that we are committed to working to reach a long-term solution. Thank you for your continued feedback and engagement.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqui Campbell
Interim Director of Property Improvements