Houses in Multiple Occupation

HMO

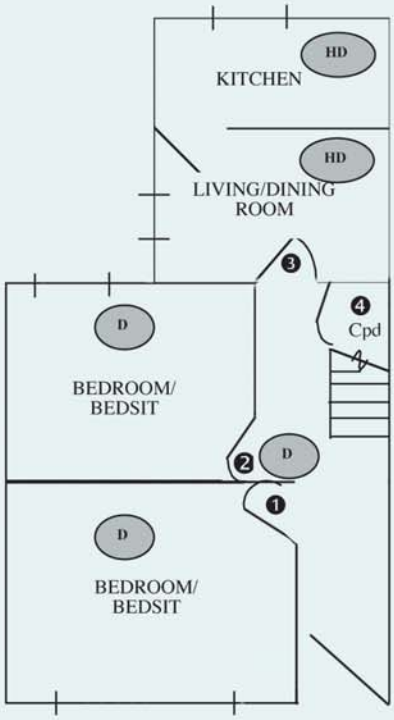
Means of escape and other fire precautions standard

A guide for landlords of bedsits, shared housing and other housing in multiple occupation.

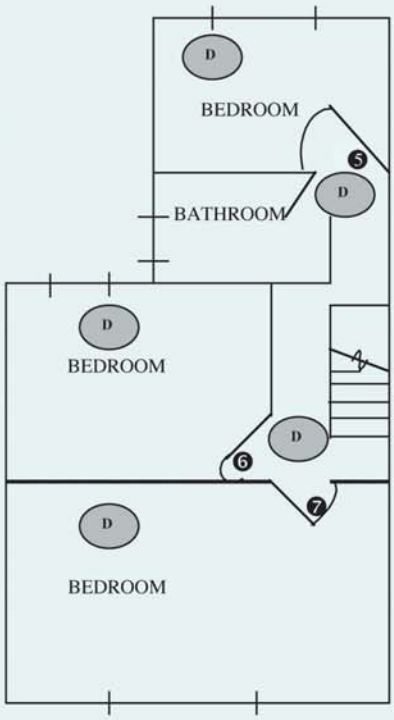
City and County of Swansea
Housing & Public Health Division
Environment Department
The Guildhall
Swansea SA1 4PE

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

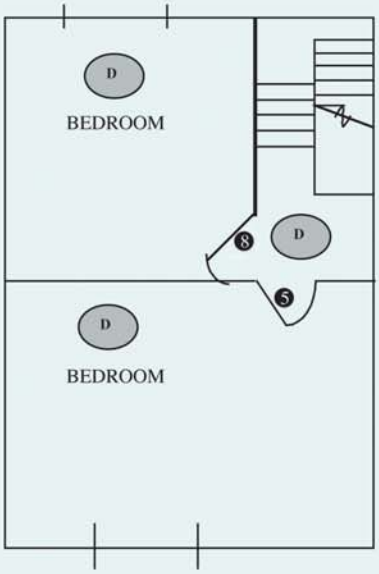
Diagram 1



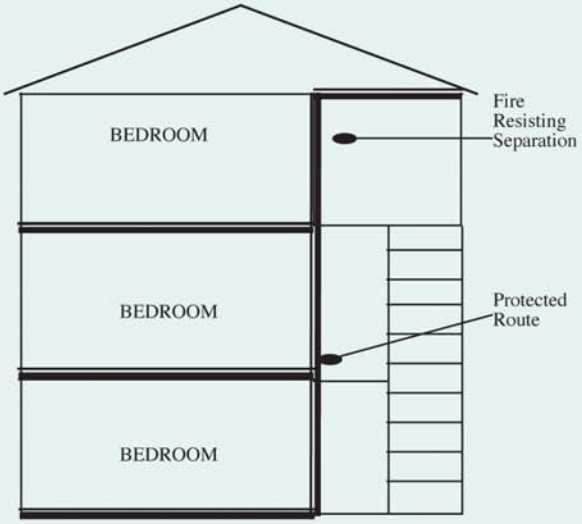
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



SECTION

D = Smoke Detector

HD = Heat Detector

1 etc = Fire door

= Fires Resisting Construction

= Fire Resisting Door

MEANS OF ESCAPE AND OTHER FIRE PRECAUTIONS STANDARD

This document aims to describe the standard for means of escape in case of fire and other fire precautions required in different Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

New legislation contained in the Housing Act 2004 means that it is a legal requirement for certain HMOs to apply to the local authority for a licence in order to continue to operate legally. When issuing a licence the local authority will attach conditions to the licence, and one of the conditions will be to provide appropriate fire precaution facilities at the property.

However, whether or not your property is licensable, all HMOs must be upgraded to provide appropriate fire precaution facilities, as described in this guide.

What is an HMO

The new legislation has also introduced a new definition of an HMO.

This is now "a house or flat occupied by three or more people forming two or more households and sharing amenities", e.g. kitchen and bathroom facilities.

It also applies to:

- Buildings/houses converted into self contained flats that do not meet the requirements of the 1991 Building Regulations **and** at least one third of the flats are privately rented, or
- houses occupied by 3 or more people, forming 2 or more households in a converted building that is not entirely self contained.

e.g. a basement flat, with shared maisonette at ground/first floors, etc.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

This has also been introduced with the new legislation. It provides a way in which local authorities assess housing conditions. It uses a risk assessment approach and its aim is to provide a system to enable risks from hazards to health and safety in dwellings, to be removed or minimised.

The means of escape and other fire precautions standards specified in this guide, relates to this system.

Please note that the works specified in this document are a guide to the type of work that will be necessary to upgrade HMOs to the required standard. Each individual property will require works that are similar to the standard, but that will vary from property to property.

However, close adherence to these ‘ standards’ and completion of the works to a satisfactory level, will ensure you progress towards meeting Licensing requirements, or current legislative standards for the non-licensable HMOs.

MEANS OF ESCAPE AND OTHER FIRE PRECAUTIONS STANDARD

The main principles behind the works specified in the following 'standard' guide are based on:

- the provision of a **'protected route'** and
- the provision of **other fire precautions**.

A combination of these two provisions aims to reduce the risks of fire starting and spreading throughout the property, and so minimising the risk to health and safety of the occupants from fire.

Means of Escape – The 'Protected Route'

Means of escape is the provision of a 'Protected Route' within the dwelling to enable occupiers to leave to a place of safety in the event of a fire. In most cases, this does **not** mean the provision of an external fire escape.

The protected route usually includes the staircase and internal hallways. This will provide a safe route out of the house if it is enclosed by fire resisting construction, so that in the event of a fire it remains free from smoke and flames long enough (usually a minimum of 30 minutes) to allow the occupants to leave the house safely.

Generally all habitable rooms e.g. bedrooms, living rooms, must have direct access onto the protected route.

All doors leading onto the protected route must be fire resistant, and fitted to a high standard.

Horizontal and Vertical fire resistant separation between individual rooms, and between floors is also necessary as part of the means of escape at the property. Depending on the existing construction this may mean upgrading of walls, floors, ceilings and doors to certain rooms at the property.

The **staircase** itself forms part of the escape route, and for this reason it must also be protected.

The underside of the staircase – or soffits – must have a full half hour fire resistance, and any cupboards below the staircases must be kept empty of all stored material, and upgraded. This will mean replacing the existing spandrel area with fire proof material (see later) and relocation of any gas or electric meters, as access to the understairs area must be denied.

Other Fire Precautions

This can include many items, but generally requires provision of the following:-

- Fire fighting equipment (e.g. fire extinguishers and blankets);
- A smoke detection system **or** fully automatic fire alarm (L2 type) system;
- Emergency lighting, where appropriate;
- Safe gas and electrical installations;
- Control and management of stored items on the escape route;
- Directional signs – to indicate a route to safety.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS - 3 OR MORE STOREY HMO

The general requirements for provision of suitable fire precaution facilities and equipment are as follows:

NB. See Diagram 1 Layout Plan & Appendix A for more detailed specification of work standards required. The enclosed 'Practice Notes' must also be read in conjunction with this standard - to provide advice to contractors.

1. Fire Doors Generally, full **half hour** fire resisting doors must be fitted to **all** doors of all rooms leading onto the hall, stairs and landing (escape route).

Fire doors must also be fitted to:-

- understairs cupboards;
- **bathrooms** containing gas central heating boilers or airing cupboards;
- any other cupboards sited on the escape route (see Diagram 1)

NB. These doors must be fitted to a very high standard, as specified in Appendix A - 'Doors'. It will often require replacement of the door frames to accommodate the new fire doors and includes fitting thresholds, self-closing devices, hinges, handles, signs, as specified.

It may be possible to arrange an inspection after one door has been fitted to check the door has been fitted to the required standards.

NB. Where bedrooms/bathrooms are situated beyond high risk rooms, such as kitchens or living rooms, it will be necessary to fit a fire door to the room, and also provide a secondary means of escape via an openable window to a place of safety. However, it is preferable that this type of layout is avoided, if possible.

2. Floors To obtain a full half hour fire separation between one floor and the next, the floors to all rooms on the **first floor** (including bathrooms and W.C.s, cupboards, etc.) and all rooms on the **second and subsequent floors** to be upgraded using 6mm hardboard or plywood as specified in **Appendix A - 'Floors'**

NB. The floors to **'Rear Annexe'** landing areas that are directly above kitchen/living rooms/other rooms, must be upgraded, as must ground floor rooms sited above a habitable basement.

3. Ceilings

All ceilings that are lath and plaster construction or plasterboard that are cracked or damaged must be upgraded or renewed, using 12.5mm plasterboard and a 3mm gypsum plaster skim **(Artex is not accepted)**. This is necessary to provide a full half hour fire resistance between one floor and the next. (See Diagram 1).

Works to be completed as specified in **Appendix A - 'Ceilings'**.

NB. The top landing ceiling **must** always be upgraded to this standard, to provide the 'seal' to the top of the escape route. (See Appendix A - 'Ceilings')

4. Loft Hatches

These are to be upgraded using fire line board or plasterboard - as specified in **Appendix A - 'Loft Hatches'**, and are to be fitted with two bolts to secure them shut.

5. Staircases

Soffits of staircases to be underdrawn to protect them from fire.

Spandrel area / understairs area - to be upgraded as specified and infilled to deny the facility for storage.

See Appendix A - 'Staircases' & Practice Notes

Attic Rooms - There must be a **minimum headroom clearance of 2m** from string of the stairs/half landing area to the ceiling. If this is not the case then either

a) a dormer extension must be constructed over the stairs, or

b) this room must not be used for human habitation, i.e. as a bedroom, study, living room, kitchen, etc. It may be used for storage purposes only. A Prohibition Order will be placed on this room if it is not to be used, however it must still be upgraded, i.e. fire door fitted and alarm system continued into this room, etc.

In addition steep winding staircases to attic rooms - impede the means of escape from such rooms and, unless a new staircase can be installed having a straight flight of stairs up to the attic room, a prohibition order will be placed on the room, as described above.

6. Partitions/ Walls

Most solid walls will provide a full half hour fire resistance. Any partition walls must be constructed to a minimum standard to provide 30 minutes fire resistance as described in **Appendix A – 'Partitions'**.

Any new partition walls e.g. used to split rooms, create bathrooms, etc., must also be constructed to this standard.

All walls between rooms, **and** those that lead onto the escape route are to be a minimum of half hour fire resistance.

Other Fire Precautions

7. Storage

No storage is allowed on the escape route.

Any cupboards on the escape route must be emptied and locked shut.

No gas/electric cookers or LPG or other portable heaters must be sited/used on the escape route.

8. General

Gas meters must **not** be sited on the escape route or under the stairs or behind a locked door. (It is preferable that these are relocated to outside the property).

Any gas meters sited on protected route must be the half hour fire rated type.

A current, satisfactory CORGI gas safety report must be obtained annually and kept in log book.

Electric meters and installations **must** comply with current standards, these must not be 'CARD METERS'.

Consumer units sited in the understairs area **must** be relocated.

A current, satisfactory electrical safety certificate must be obtained and kept in log book.

Internet cabling/other cables - these to be suitably installed so as not to damage fire doors/frames/thresholds, and so that the cables do not prevent fire doors from closing securely on the self closing device.

NB. See **Appendix A – 'General Requirement'**

9. Fire Fighting Equipment

1 x 9 litre water extinguisher (or 1 x 6 litre AFFF rated extinguisher) to be sited on **each** landing, **and** 1 x 2.27 kg dry powder extinguisher (13B rating) **plus** 1 fire blanket to be sited in **each** kitchen.

See **Appendix A - 'Fire Fighting Equipment'** for detailed specification.

10. Fire Warning System

An electrically operated automatic fire detection system (L2 type) is to be provided throughout the dwelling. This must comply with BS5839 Part 6 and must be fitted by an NICEIC/ECA approved contractor or other recognised approved organisation.

See diagram 1 for guide to location of detectors, and **Appendix A - 'Fire Warning System'** for detailed specification.

NB. Where changes in ceiling levels occur e.g. on rear annexe landings, then additional detectors are to be installed in this area.

On completion of the installation a Commissioning certificate will be required from a qualified installer, and a service must be carried out annually by a suitably qualified electrician.

11. Signs and Notices

The following signs must be provided:

'FIRE EXIT' to be sited above/adjacent to the main entrance door of the property.

'DIRECTIONAL SIGNS' to be sited one on each landing, indicating route to be taken to final exit.

'FIRE DOOR KEEP SHUT' one on the front face of each fire door.

'FIRE DOOR KEEP LOCKED' on fire door to cupboards.

A **'FIRE ROUTINE'** notice must be displayed in the hallway/communal area.

Name, address & telephone number of the manager must be sited in hallway or communal area.

NB. See Appendix A – 'Signs and Notices' for specific details.

12. Locks

Ensure that all locks to all entrances/exits to property are of an europrofile type only.

13. Furniture Ensure the furniture supplied in the property complies with the requirements of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988. Please refer to the enclosed guidance leaflet.

14. Building Regulations Please note that all works must comply with current Building Regulations, and certain works may require a Building Notice e.g. erection of new partition walls, installation of new windows, etc.

It is advised that you contact the Building Control Section – Tel. 635600, prior to commencement of works.

15. Planning Permission For shared houses of up to 6 individuals, planning permission is not required. However, if you let/propose to let your property to 7 or more individuals on a shared basis, then planning permission must be sought.
Also, if you are to change the use of the property e.g. from shared accommodation to flats, bedsits etc., planning permission must be sought.

NB. Please note that detailed specifications of works will be provided following an inspection from an officer from this department, which will be appropriate to each HMO. This Means of Escape Standard is a **guide** as to what is required. However, due to the potential number of properties needing licences this inspection may take up to 1 year to complete.

Please be aware that any works you undertake at the property prior to this inspection, may need to be amended/added to after inspection by an officer from this department.

A consultation process is undertaken with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service following an inspection of each individual HMO that has not been previously inspected, and this may also result in amendments being made to the Schedules of Work.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS - 2 STOREY PROPERTIES

NB. If the property has a habitable basement, or attic room, then the property will be classed as a 3 or 4 storey HMO, and 'General Requirements' for 3+ storey HMOs will apply.

Generally the requirement for 2 storey HMOs are the same as those for 3 storey properties, with the exception of **Fire Warning System**.

In **two storey** properties mains operated interlinked smoke detectors must be fitted to each habitable room, and the hall and landings, with a heat detector sited in the kitchen.

See **Appendix A – 'Fire Warning Systems'** for detailed specification.

APPENDIX A

DETAILED MEANS OF ESCAPE AND OTHER FIRE PRECAUTION SPECIFICATIONS

NB. To be read in conjunction with Practice Notes which are a technical guide and to be passed to builder/carpenter.

1. DOORS

For Half Hour/One Hour Fire Doors

NB. All doors to be purpose made fire doors, in accordance with BS 476 parts 21-24.

Each door shall be fitted with a minimum of **three hinges** positioned with the rear edge of the top hinge 150 mm from the top, and the bottom 225 mm from the bottom of the door. The third hinge shall be fitted 600mm from the top of the door, to the top of the hinge blade.

Supply and fix (in accordance with Manufacturers instructions) an approved **intumescent strip** incorporating a smoke seal to the edges (top and two sides) of the door, or alternatively inserted into the door frame/lining. The gap between the door edge and frame is dependant upon which type is used. It will be between approximately 3mm and 4.5mm, but whichever type is used, it must be remembered that the brush strip has to come into contact with the door edge or frame, as this provides a smoke barrier.

The frames of these doors shall have rebates or stops not more than 12.5mm deep. Stops to be screwed to the door frame/lining at 230mm centres.

A solid timber **threshold** is required to be provided to each door frame and to be the full width of that frame. (See practice notes).

The gap between the threshold and base of fire door to be no less and no more than 3mm. (See practice notes).

Effective self-closing devices are to be fitted to the doors (see practice note), so that the doors are closed and held firmly in the closed position. **NB.** garden gate type and coil spring type closers are not acceptable.

If door opens onto a wall, then a solid turret door stop is to be fitted.

Windows - As Secondary Means of Escape

Provide a tilt and turn or side hung casement window. The openable area of the window must be a minimum of 800mm high and 500mm wide. If necessary enlarge opening to suit, fully in accordance with Building Regulations.

2. FLOORS

- Floor coverings to be of either 6mm plywood or hardboard (or 4.8mm high density hardboard). Coverings to be nailed with 19mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres on the line of the joist. All joints to coincide with the line of the joists.

NB. Boards to be butt jointed and tightly fitted at all edges.

- Laminate flooring may be used, but must be the 'click lock'/tongue & groove type flooring, and tightly fitted either below skirtings, or use a quadrant beading at edges to provide a tight fit.

3. CEILINGS

Half Hour Ceilings

- **Upgrade:** Underdraw with 12.5mm plasterboard and skim finish on wire mesh and battens. (See practice note). Plasterboard to be fixed with galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges; joints to coincide with line of joists and shall be taped and filled. Provide a 3.2mm gypsum plaster finish. **NB Do not artex the ceiling.**
- **Take down and renew ceiling** using one layer of 12.5mm plasterboard fixed with 40mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges; joints to coincide with line of joists and shall be taped and filled. Provide a 3.2mm gypsum plaster finish.
- **One Hour Ceilings**

  Renew using (x2) layers of 12.5mm plasterboard. Fix one layer of 12.5mm plasterboard using 40mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges. Fix second layer of 12.5mm plasterboard using 60mm galvanised clout nails as above. Provide 3.2mm gypsum plaster skim. Lay boards to break joint. All joints taped and filled prior to skimming.

4. LOFT HATCH

Loft hatch to be constructed of 12.5mm ply or blockboard. A layer of 12.5mm plasterboard to be screw fixed to top and bottom of hatch. Hatch to be secured with 2 (no) swan neck bolts.

5. STAIRCASES

- **Soffits** to be underdrawn using 12.5mm plasterboard and skim finish.
- **Spandrel** this may need to be reconstructed if it is tongue and groove boarding or timber panelling or non existent. To upgrade, use a timber framework to be constructed using 75 x 44mm studwork, to accommodate new fire door and frame. Studwork to be fixed at maximum centres of 600mm, lined **both** sides with 12.5mm plasterboard fixed with 60mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges. All joints to coincide with line of studding and shall be taped and filled. Provide 3.2mm smooth gypsum plaster skim finish.

  Timber panelling within protected shaft shall achieve class '1' surface spread of flame fire protection.

6. PARTITIONS

- **Half Hour Partitions**

  A full half hour fire resistance is achieved by constructing these partitions with a minimum 75 x 44mm softwood studding at maximum 600mm centres lined both sides with 12.5mm plasterboard, fixed with 60mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges; joints to coincide with line of studding and shall be taped and filled. Provide 3.2mm gypsum plaster finish.

  NB Building Regulation approval may be required when constructing new partition walls.

- **One Hour Partitions**

  Use minimum 75 x 44mm softwood studding at maximum 600mm centres lined both sides with two (x2) layers of 12.5mm plasterboard. First layer fixed with 60mm galvanised clout nails at no more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges. Second layer fixed with 60mm galvanised clout nails as above. Lay boards to break joint. Joints to coincide with line of studding and shall be taped and filled. Provide 3.2mm gypsum plaster finish.

  NB Building Regulation approval may be required when constructing new partition walls.

- **Glazing/Boarding above fire doors**

  Any glazing/boarding above fire doors must be replaced and infilled by lining both sides of frame with 12.5mm plasterboard fixed with 40mm galvanised clout nails at not more than 150mm centres and not less than 10mm from board edges.

OTHER FIRE PRECAUTIONS

7. STORAGE

- No storage to be permitted within protected shaft and/or escape routes.
- Cupboard located at any hallway/understairs area shall be emptied of all stored materials and is to be kept locked shut at all times. A permanent notice to this effect in 10mm plain letters shall be provided on the door; OR

  Remove cupboard completely and make good.
- No gas or electrical cookers or portable heating appliances including gas water heaters, to be permitted within protected shaft and/or escape routes.

8. GENERAL

- Portable self-contained liquefied petroleum gas (L.P.G.) appliances shall not be used in any circumstances within the premises.
- Any gas meters located in the understairs area/hallway shall be repositioned to within some other part of the premises, other than the circulatory space/protected shaft.

  This work shall be carried out by the Gas Board or one of their approved contractors.

ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS

- **NB Card meters are NOT permitted as a CONSTANT electrical supply is needed for the smoke detection system.**

  Have the electrical system examined by a competent electrician i.e. N.I.C.E.I.C. or ECA approved contractor.

  If existing consumer units are located in the understairs area then these should be relocated to a suitable position in the ground floor hallway.

  Carry out all the necessary works detailed in the report; the report and completion certificate (16th Edition I.E.E. Regulations) shall be retained for examination by the Local Authority.

  It is advisable to provide three double sockets to each bed/study room to prevent overloading of sockets by stereos, computers, televisions etc.

GAS INSTALLATIONS

- **Have the gas installation(s) examined by a CORGI registered installer** and provide a copy of the report to this Department. Complete all works necessary to render the installations safe and in good working order. Also, furnish this Department with a copy of your “Landlord’s Gas Safety Record” as required by the Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1994.

9. FIRE FIGHTING EQUIPMENT

- The following fire fighting equipment is required:-

  1 x 9 litre (or 1 x 6 litre AFFF) water type fire extinguisher at each floor level in the circulation space.

  1 x 2.27 kg. dry powder fire extinguisher with 13 B rating and 1 Fire Blanket for each kitchen area.

- Extinguishers should be fitted on wall brackets with the handle or carrying device of the extinguisher at about 1.1m from floor level.

  Fire blanket canisters should be fitted on wall brackets with the base of the container at about 1.5m from floor level.

  Fire extinguishers should conform to B.A.F.E. Standard (British Approvals for Fire Equipment).

- Fire extinguishers at the property must be serviced by a suitably qualified contractor on an annual basis. All works to be carried out as specified in the report, and ensure that the fire extinguishers conform to British Approvals for Fire Equipment. A copy of the report to be provided for and retained by the Local Authority.

10. FIRE WARNING SYSTEM

2 STOREY PROPERTIES ONLY:

- **Installation by an N.I.C.E.I.C. or E.C.A. approved contractor or a member of BFPSA.**

  Smoke alarms must be mains operated with battery back up, in accordance with British Standard 5839 (Part 6). The smoke alarms to be interlinked. The location of each of the smoke alarms is marked (D) on the example Diagram 1. (See also practice note).

  In addition, an approved automatic heat detector is to be provided to kitchens (in accordance with the recommendations in part 1 of BS 5839 for siting and spacing) as marked (HD) on the enclosed example Diagram 1.

  The heat detector to be interlinked with the smoke detectors and mains operated.

- A certificate and report for the smoke detectors at the property must be provided annually from an NICEIC/ECA contractor or other recognised body on the safety and condition of the alarm system. Carry out all works as specified in the report. A certificate of compliance to be retained on log book.

3 OR MORE STOREY PROPERTIES:

- **Installation by an N.I.C.E.I.C. or E.C.A. approved contractor or a member of BFPSA OR Part P self certifying approved contractor.**

Provide an electrically operated automatic fire detection system in the premises. The installation to comply with the requirements of British Standard 5839, "Fire Detection and Alarm System in Buildings - Code of Practice for Installation and Servicing" for an L2 type system AS FOLLOWS:

THE INSTALLATION TO INCORPORATE:-

(a) approved automatic smoke detectors at the following locations (in accordance with the recommendations in part 1 of BS 5839 for siting and spacing) as marked (D) on the enclosed plan.

(b) approved automatic heat detectors at the following locations (in accordance with the recommendations in part 1 of BS 5839 for siting and spacing) as marked (HD) on the enclosed plan.

(c) alarm sounders on each floor landing and at all other necessary locations in order to comply with the above Code of Practice. (Section Two 9.4 - "Audibility of Alarms").

The minimum sound level should be 75 dB(A) at the bedhead with all doors shut.

(d) manually operated call points to be provided on each floor landing and at every exit from property. (See practice note).

A certificate of compliance with the foregoing code of practice to be submitted to the Local Authority. A maintenance contract must be taken out with a competent contractor for regular servicing of the system.

Provide the name, address and telephone number (daytime and evening) of at least two key holders who can be contacted to disable the system in the event of a 'false alarm'.

NB Card meters are not permitted as a constant electrical supply is needed for the smoke detection system.

11. SIGNS AND NOTICES

- Provide the following signs and notices:

FIRE EXIT	-	Above or adjacent to main front door
DIRECTIONAL SIGNS	-	On each landing
FIRE DOOR KEEP SHUT	-	On each fire door
FIRE DOOR KEEP LOCKED	-	On fire doors understairs/cupboards

A NOTICE containing the name, address and telephone number of the manager of the house. This Notice to incorporate a procedure for "FIRE ROUTINE" (See practice note), fixed in A4 size picture frame and screw fixed to wall in hall.

Fire Safety Signs, Notices and Graphic Symbols are to comply with the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996, or British Standard 5499 Part 1, 1990 "Specification for Fire Safety Signs". Bilingual (Welsh and English) text on signs is considered acceptable as long as the signs comply with the above standards.

12. FURNITURE

- Ensure the furniture supplied in the property complies with the requirements of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988. Please refer to the guidance leaflet enclosed with this Notice.

  Note: The onus of responsibility for determining if furniture complies with the Regulations is that of the Landlord. You must remove any non-complying furniture in accordance with the requirement of the Regulations.

LOCKS

- Ensure that locks to all entrance/exits to property are of an europrofile type only.

13. ELECTRICAL CABLES/COMPUTER CABLES

- Cabling to be securely clipped to skirtings/walls and safely routed through walls and not under or through doors. Any holes in walls where cables penetrate to be filled with gypsum plaster/intumescent filler.

ADVISORY NOTES

Alternative works may in certain instances achieve the same level of fire resistance.

Subject to changes in circumstances, the proposed scheme may be amended following consultation with inspecting officer.

Advice on this matter may be obtained from this Department.

All work shall comply with current Building Regulations and relevant Codes of Practice.

Please refer to Practice Notes for further information.

Advice on the availability of Signs and Notices may be obtained from the Department.

Designprint 15342-06

City and County of Swansea
Housing & Public Health Division
Environment Department
The Guildhall
Swansea SA1 4PE

☎ 01792 635600
🖷 01792 648079
www.swansea.gov.uk/hmos