



Building Regulations Approved Document B (Fire Safety) Changes

Effective 30 September 2026 (England)

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Audience: Property Owners, Managing Agents, Developers, Dutyholders, Building Managers and Responsible Persons

Executive Summary

The Government's latest amendments to Approved Document B (Fire Safety) come into force on 30 September 2026 in England. The changes primarily affect the design and construction of new residential buildings, particularly those over 18 metres in height, and are intended to strengthen fire safety provisions and support safer evacuation strategies within new developments.

For most existing occupied buildings, these amendments do not create new retrospective duties. However, building owners, developers and asset managers should understand how the changes may affect future development, refurbishment and building control applications.

What Is Changing?

1. More Than One Common Staircase for Residential Buildings Over 18 metres

One of the key amendments to Approved Document B is new guidance recommending that blocks of flats with a storey 18 metres or more above ground level should be provided with more than one common staircase.

What This Means

For new residential developments, designers and developers should consider the implications of the revised guidance at an early stage.

The revised guidance is intended to improve:

- Occupant evacuation options.
- Firefighter access and operational resilience.
- Building resilience should one staircase become compromised by fire or smoke.

Potential Impacts

- Changes to building layouts and core design.
- Potential reductions in net saleable or lettable floor area.
- Increased construction costs and design complexity.
- Earlier engagement with fire engineers and building control professionals.

2. New Guidance Supporting Evacuation Lifts

Approved Document B introduces additional design provisions and terminology to support the inclusion and use of evacuation lifts within blocks of flats.

Purpose

Evacuation lifts are intended to assist:

- Residents with reduced mobility.

- Wheelchair users.
- People who may struggle to evacuate via stairs during an emergency, for example those with young children.

The amendments aim to ensure that evacuation lifts are properly integrated into the overall fire strategy of a building where they are provided.

It is important to note that these amendments support the design and use of evacuation lifts but do not introduce a general requirement for evacuation lifts to be installed in all residential buildings.

Transitional Arrangements

The previous edition of Approved Document B may continue to apply where:

- A building notice, initial notice or full plans application was submitted before 30 September 2026; and
- The works are considered "sufficiently progressed" before that date or become sufficiently progressed within 18 months of 30 September 2026.

These transitional arrangements are particularly important for developers with schemes already progressing through planning, procurement or construction.

What Does This Mean for Existing Buildings?

The amendments are primarily aimed at new construction projects and certain building works rather than existing occupied buildings.

Importantly, the changes do not create a general requirement for existing residential buildings to be upgraded simply because the guidance has changed.

However, where building work, material alterations or changes of use are proposed, the relevant building regulations requirements applicable at that time will need to be considered.

Practical Considerations for Property Owners and Managing Agents

Have New Developments Planned?

- Review residential projects approaching the 18m height threshold.
- Confirm potential programme and design implications with project teams.
- Assess whether designs remain aligned with the updated guidance taking effect from 30 September 2026.

Refurbishing Existing High-Rise Assets?

- Consider how future building control applications may be affected.
- Review fire strategies early in the design process.
- Engage competent fire engineering support where significant alterations are proposed.

Managing Higher-Risk Residential Buildings?

Continue focusing on:

- Robust fire risk assessments.

- Resident engagement.
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Planning (PEEPs) where appropriate.
- Maintenance of fire safety systems and compartmentation.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Changes take effect from 30 September 2026 in England.
- ✓ Blocks of flats with a storey 18m or more above ground level should be provided with more than one common staircase in accordance with the revised guidance.
- ✓ Additional provisions support the incorporation and use of evacuation lifts within residential buildings where they are provided.
- ✓ Most existing buildings are not retrospectively affected by these amendments.
- ✓ Building owners and developers should review current and future projects to understand any design, programme and compliance implications.

How Vantify Can Help

Vantify can support clients through:

- Fire strategy reviews.
- Design-stage fire engineering liaison.
- Fire risk assessments.
- Building Safety Act compliance support.
- Resident engagement and evacuation planning advice.

The Vantify Ecosystem



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