

## Building Safety Regulator: Navigating the Process and its Current Reality



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## Introduction

In the aftermath of major tragedies in the UK's built environment, such as the Grenfell Tower fire, the establishment of a robust Building Safety Regulator (BSR) has become a critical focus for policymakers and industry stakeholders alike. The BSR is tasked with ensuring the safety of high-risk buildings (HRBs). This piece delves into how the process is intended to work, where it stands today, and addresses the pressing question: Has the government implemented an adequate system for prioritizing safety in high-risk buildings? We will also explore the current status of minor works HRB applications processed through the BSR.

## The Vision of the Building Safety Regulator

### 1.1.1 Objectives of the BSR

The BSR is conceived as a comprehensive framework to enhance building safety, especially for high-risk buildings. The objectives of this regulator can be summarized as follows:

1. **Oversight of Building Safety Practices:** The BSR aims to implement stringent oversight of construction and renovation processes in HRBs. It seeks to ensure that safety regulations are adhered to, preventing future disasters.
2. **Compliance Monitoring:** By supervising compliance with established legislation and industry standards, the BSR will serve as a guardian of safety protocols within the construction sector.
3. **Facilitating Communication:** An essential function of the BSR is to foster communication among stakeholders—including builders, inspectors, and the public—about safety practices and concerns.

### 1.1.2 The Ideal Process

The theoretical framework of the Building Safety Regulator envisages a highly structured, transparent process involving:

- **Initial Application Review:** Upon submission of HRB plans, the BSR must swiftly assess compliance with all safety requirements.
- **Regular Inspections:** Following approval, there should be a series of mandatory inspections at various stages of construction or renovation to verify adherence to regulations.
- **Final Approval and Handover:** Before any building is occupied, a final safety assessment must be conducted to ensure ongoing safety compliance.
- **Post-Completion Monitoring:** Once a building is operational, a system for ongoing monitoring and intervention allows for rapid response to any issues that may arise.

## The Current Reality: A Mixed Picture

### 1.1.3 Implementation Challenges

Despite the ambitious vision of a fully functional BSR, the practical reality has revealed significant challenges.

1. **Resource Constraints:** One of the primary issues plaguing the BSR's effectiveness is a lack of adequate resources. Budget restrictions have limited staffing, causing delays in the processing of applications and inspections.
2. **Lack of Clarity in Regulations:** Many stakeholders have expressed confusion regarding the existing regulations. A lack of clarity in the regulations governing HRBs has led to inconsistent applications and interpretations across the industry.
3. **Insufficient Training and Expertise:** The effectiveness of the BSR is contingent upon having well-trained personnel who are equipped to enforce safety protocols. Unfortunately, there has been a shortage of trained professionals, leading to potential oversights in safety compliance.

4. **Slow Progress on Technological Integration:** The BSR's ability to monitor buildings and maintain records in a timely manner is hindered by outdated methodologies that have not yet fully integrated modern technology.

#### 1.1.4 Perspectives on Government Action

1. **Government Commitment:** Proponents of the government's actions argue that significant strides have been made toward establishing the BSR. The introduction of the Building Safety Act in 2022, which sets out the legislative framework for the BSR, is often heralded as a monumental step forward.
2. **Calls for Improvement:** Conversely, critics argue that despite regulatory frameworks, the pace of change has been disappointingly slow. They argue that more proactive measures and a heightened sense of urgency are needed to protect at-risk residents.
3. **Focus on Cultural Change:** There is widespread agreement among industry professionals that building safety must become a cultural priority in construction practices. The government is urged to foster a new ethos that prioritizes safety at every stage, from design to occupancy.

## Current Status of Minor Works HRB Applications Through the BSR

As the BSR begins to handle minor works applications related to HRBs, several issues and observations have emerged regarding this new process.

#### 1.1.5 Streamlined Processes

1. **Application Simplification:** One of the improvements touted by the BSR is the simplification of applications for minor works in HRBs. This has reportedly made it easier for businesses to comply with safety standards without the burden of excessive bureaucracy.
2. **Dedicated Resources:** The introduction of a dedicated team to focus on minor works applications has alleviated some previous delays. It allows for quicker reviews and approvals, ensuring that necessary renovations can occur promptly.

#### 1.1.6 Existing Hurdles

1. **Communication Gaps:** Although streamlined processes have been established, there are still lapses in communication between the BSR and applicants. Stakeholders have raised concerns that guidance is insufficient, leading to misunderstandings regarding necessary steps and timelines.
2. **Variable Approval Times:** Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite improvements, approval times for minor works applications remain inconsistent. Delays can have severe implications for both business operations and occupant safety.

## Conclusion: The Path Forward

While the Building Safety Regulator was established with noble intentions—to safeguard lives and promote best practices in high-risk buildings—the journey toward its full realization is fraught with challenges. The government has laid the groundwork, but it must do more to ensure that these regulations translate into effective oversight, compliance, and a culture of safety.

As this initiative continues to evolve, feedback from industry professionals, compliance with regulations, and a concerted effort to enhance resources will be crucial. The onus is on all stakeholders—government, builders, and the community—to collaborate tirelessly to protect lives, foster trust in the regulatory framework, and ensure buildings meet the expected safety standards. The ongoing journey will require diligence and commitment, but the ultimate goal of creating safer high-risk buildings is one worth pursuing with vigor and accountability.