

From Simon Burns MP  
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07 FEB 2011

Thank you for your letter of 15 January expressing concern about the potential loss of Department of Health fire safety guidance.

The Health and Social Care Bill is introducing radical changes that impact on both the NHS and the Department, with the overall aim of improving care and accountability, and empowering patients to improve their health outcomes. In the new system, it will not be a function of the Department to provide guidance on the physical environment for providers of NHS services.

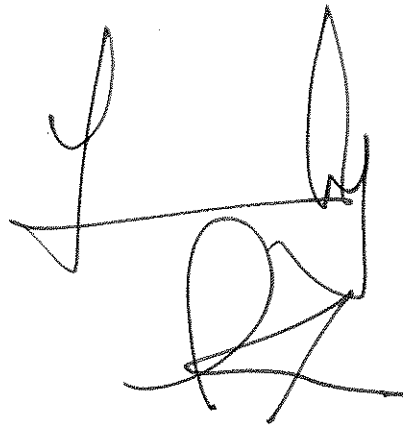
We have been engaging over recent months with stakeholders to identify if there is a continuing need for guidance as we move forward to deliver the new system. Initial discussions have indicated that guidance to underpin standards, such as the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Quality Standards and minimum standards set by the Care Quality Commission for registration of providers, is essential. We are now looking at options for where guidance might best fit within the new landscape.

Any future guidance is likely to look and feel very different from that currently produced. The current suite of guidance (Health Technical Memoranda and Health Building Notes) is likely to be reduced in quantity, and will only be produced to reflect a requirement that is healthcare specific. It will also reflect the strategic direction of localism, in that it will set out requirements to meet minimum standards, but it will be for local providers of NHS services to reach their own decisions on how to achieve compliance.

Your Association's willingness to be involved in any future development of healthcare specific fire safety guidance is welcomed. It is highly likely that any guidance on the physical environment, including fire safety, will in the future need to be co-developed between providers, regulators, industry and professional advisers.

I hope this assures you of the Department's commitment to the highest standards of fire safety in the NHS, but if you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact my officials who are leading on this work. You should address your queries in the first instance to Rob Smith ([rob.smith@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rob.smith@dh.gsi.gov.uk)) who will either deal with the issue directly or forward it to the appropriate official.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Burns', with a stylized, cursive script.

**SIMON BURNS**