



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
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Dear Clive

## **GRENFELL TOWER FIRE – ONE YEAR ON**

As we prepare to mark a year since the Grenfell Tower disaster that represents the greatest loss of life in a residential fire in a century, and reflective of the House's wish of a statement of the Government's work to respond to the tragedy, I want to set out the steps that have been taken to date.

The Government is absolutely clear that a catastrophe of this kind should never have happened; and that the initial response to the fire was not good enough. The Government's highest priority has been, and remains, to ensure that the bereaved and survivors receive the support they need, now and in the months and years to come.

As you will be aware, I and my predecessor have regularly updated the House over the last 12 months, but I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you as Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee to set out in more detail the work the Government has undertaken.

### **Support to those affected**

I have personally assured Grenfell residents that their welfare is one of my biggest priorities. I have visited the site and have held regular meetings with representatives of the bereaved and survivors to discuss their on-going concerns and issues.

The Ministerial Recovery Group, which I now chair, co-ordinates the cross-government effort to support those affected. The Group has met 23 times and will continue to do so for as long as is needed. I am supported by Dominic Raab, the Housing Minister, and Nick Hurd, the Grenfell Victims' Minister, whose work ensures that our actions are always led by the needs of those affected. The Victims Unit, within my Department also provides a single point of access into Government services for those affected and has co-ordinated delivery of government services on the ground.

Ensuring the immediate and long term health needs of those affected by the fire are met remains an absolute priority. NHS staff mobilised from day one, working on the ground to build

trust with local residents and ensure that those needing support received it. A multi-disciplinary health outreach team to support patients, families and neighbours affected by the tragedy was established to provide emotional support, trauma-related screening, guidance and signposting in a range of community spaces, including working with faith and community groups to demystify the therapeutic process, co-produce services to meet their needs and encourage take up.

Health partners continue to provide a comprehensive and resident-led approach supported by an Outreach Team that is innovative and reactive to the needs of the individual. The Outreach Team has ensured that everyone who lived in the Tower has been approached and offered screening and treatment. Every nearby resident with contact details has also been approached. A comprehensive trauma screen and treat programme is in place, and tailored support is being provided to the bereaved, survivors and relatives, in particular, as the Grenfell Tower Inquiry gets underway.

To further support those affected, Jobcentre Plus and Home Office staff provided face to face support and advice, and a dedicated immigration scheme for survivors was established. Government also provided dedicated help and assistance to enable people to replace their passports and other documents and put in place a range of flexibilities, such as relaxing the rules for benefit claimants to attend face to face appointments.

### **Re-housing**

As I will update the House today, one of the most pressing issues has been finding new homes in and around Kensington and Chelsea for those who lost theirs in the fire. This was a major undertaking for the Council and I support the then Secretary of State's decision to send in an independent Taskforce to provide support and assurance on progress on the recovery, including rehousing.

While there has been some progress in recent weeks, overall the pace has been slower than any of us could have hoped for, and for those survivors of the fire, it is simply not good enough. I will not rest until every one of these households is settled into a permanent home.

203 households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk are eligible for rehousing after the fire. Of those, 198 households have now accepted temporary or permanent accommodation and 134 have moved in.

My Department is continuing to provide close scrutiny and challenge to the Council to ensure that those who are yet to settle on a home find something that meets their needs. I am assured by RBKC that, in the meantime, each of these households has had a suitable property identified or set aside for them.

The Council acquired over 300 properties to provide a choice of new homes. As many of these properties were acquired on the open market, a large scale programme of investment work has been under way to bring homes up to the right safety standard, to ensure they are of a good quality and that they meet families' needs. My Department and the independent Taskforce have been closely monitoring this work, and I have provided additional resources directly to the Council to help speed up progress. The vast majority of homes that have been accepted are now ready for households to move into and I expect many of the remaining properties to be completed in the coming weeks, although some of the more extensive adaptation could take longer. Households have been kept closely informed of the timescales in these cases and offered more suitable accommodation while they await their new home.

I am concerned that 43 households remain in hotels and I have written personally to everyone in that position to understand what additional support I, or the Council, can offer to remove any barriers to moving into a home. The Housing Minister and Minister for Grenfell Victims have also met directly with a number of survivors to understand their needs and offer further support.

The fire had a significant impact beyond those that lost their homes. A large number of households from the wider Lancaster West estate were temporarily evacuated and took up emergency accommodation following the fire. 129 of those households did not feel they could immediately return home. 38 have since moved back to their homes following improvement works to their properties. 78 households who do not yet feel able to return to their homes have moved into alternative accommodation. However, the Council is supporting 13 households who remain in hotels for various personal reasons and while they consider their options.

There are 16 households accommodated in hotels who are not eligible for priority rehousing. Their circumstances vary widely and the Council is responding to each on a case by case basis. All of these households have been made at least one offer of more suitable alternative accommodation.

I am determined that everyone affected by this fire is moved into suitable permanent accommodation and I have been clear that I expect the Council to work intensively with each household to ensure that every survivor is found a home that meets their personal needs as quickly as possible.

Further, we and the Council want to ensure that the Lancaster West estate becomes a model for social housing in the 21st century. Improvements to the estate are being co-designed with residents with support from architects and other professionals. Residents shared their priorities through two large community events in January and March and smaller meetings on a block-by-block basis since. Residents are now working with the Council to prioritise works, with some early projects already under way.

On the future of the Grenfell Tower site, we have been clear that the community shall lead the decision-making. This was firmly established by a set of principles agreed by the Government, representatives of the bereaved, survivors and community and the Council and published on 1<sup>st</sup> March. The Minister for Grenfell Victims is now taking forward work with the bereaved, survivors and the wider community to agree the scope and remit of the community-led process for what should happen to the Grenfell Tower site in the future, The common assumption is that this will lead towards agreement on a fitting memorial to remember those who lost their lives. We hope to agree the detailed process for decision-making, and how the bereaved, survivors and community can be involved, and to set this out in the near future.

The Government has made sure that the Council and other partners are supported to deliver effective recovery - over £46 million of national Government funds have already been spent and a further £34 million has been committed to help meet rehousing costs, deliver new mental health services and to deliver the improvements to the Lancaster West estate. Alongside this, the Charity Commission has coordinated the distribution of charitable funds which have been wide ranging and have to date paid nearly £24 million.

The Minister for Grenfell Victims is due to appear before the Select Committee on 20 June and will provide a further update on all these issues then.

## **Wider implications and learning lessons**

Such a tragedy should not have been possible in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, and the Government is determined to ensure there is justice for all the victims and their families. The Metropolitan Police investigation and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will ensure this happens. These are independent of Government and must be allowed to run their course.

As you will be aware, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry began its evidential hearing on the 21 May 2018 with tributes to those who lost their lives in the fire. The Government is committed to providing all the support this Inquiry needs as it progresses.

The Government also intends to take into account any emerging findings made from the Public Inquiry into regulatory reform.

### **Social Housing Green Paper**

The Chair of the Public Inquiry, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, identified broad questions on social housing policy raised through the consultation on the Inquiry terms of reference. After careful reflection he concluded these should not be within the scope of the Inquiry itself.

The Prime Minister respected the reasons set out by the Chair for not including these in the Inquiry's terms of reference, but is also very clear that should not mean the questions raised are left unanswered, and announced the intention for her Housing Minister to meet and hear from tenants across the country on social housing.

Ministers have been around the country meeting with nearly 1,000 people and hearing from over 7000 social housing residents on line about their experience of living in social housing. By listening to people living in social housing, we have built a picture of the issues they face and common concerns that will shape the Social Housing Green Paper that we aim to publish before Recess.

### **Building Safety**

But we must also act now to ensure such a catastrophe cannot happen again in the future. That is why in the days immediately after the fire my Department established a Building Safety Programme with the aim of making sure residents of high-rise residential buildings are safe and that they feel safe from the risk of fire, by identifying and ensuring building owners remediate any high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding. We established an Expert Panel chaired by Sir Ken Knight, to advise on measures building owners should put in place to make buildings safe and have provided building owners with clear advice about the steps that should be followed to remediate buildings with unsafe aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding.

Fire and rescue services have visited high rise blocks since June to carry out checks, make sure interim safety measures are put in place, and provided fire safety information to residents.

The Government's free testing service at BRE, available to all building owners since June 2017, has to date confirmed 159 high-rise residential buildings over 18m in the social sector with unsafe ACM cladding as well as 138 in the private sector. Remediation work has started in two-thirds of the social sector buildings and we have announced £400m funding for local authorities and housing associations to remediate dangerous ACM cladding systems on their buildings. Financial flexibilities are available to local authorities for other essential fire safety work.

Local authorities have worked hard to find additional affected buildings in their areas. We have announced funding of £1m to support the most affected local authorities in completing the identification of these high-rise ACM buildings. My Department is currently processing the results of this data collection and will publish further figures at the end of this month.

We've made it clear that we expect building owners in the private sector to take responsibility for meeting the costs of remediation – and not pass the costs on to leaseholders. I recently held roundtables with leaseholders and with industry to set out the Government's position on the private sector and listen to ideas. We are resolved that the private sector must step up and are ruling nothing out. Some in the sector are already doing the right thing and we would urge all others to follow. We are ruling nothing out in protecting leaseholders from costs. In the meantime, we have provided £465,000 additional funding to the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) to provide free initial legal advice and outreach to leaseholders on building safety issues to ensure they are aware of their rights and are supported to understand the terms of their leases.

### **Fire Doors**

You will be aware that a door recovered from Grenfell Tower marketed as meeting a 30-minute fire resistance standard, failed the test after approximately 15 minutes. Following an investigation into these doors, the Expert Panel advised there is a performance issue with flat entrance 30 minute fire doors supplied by Manse Masterdor Ltd. Nevertheless the National Fire Chiefs' Council advise that the risk to public safety remains low as all doors provide essential protection in a fire if they are properly closed and fire protection in a building is developed using a range of measures so a failure of one protection measure – such as fire doors – should not significantly change the overall safety of residents.

The Expert Panel have asked owners of buildings with this type of door review their buildings' fire risk assessments and consider how quickly these doors should be replaced. We have written to customers of Manse Masterdor and all local authorities and published Expert Panel advice to assist building owners with the inspection and replacement of front entrance fire doors:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-building-owners-on-assurance-and-replacing-of-flat-entrance-fire-doors](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-building-owners-on-assurance-and-replacing-of-flat-entrance-fire-doors).

### **Hackitt Review**

It is essential that people living in buildings like Grenfell Tower are not only safe, but that they feel that the state understands their lives and works for them. There is no question that their faith in this has been shaken. That is why the Government took immediate action to commission an independent, forward-looking Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety. Dame Judith Hackitt's final report was published on 17 May 2018.

It is clear that the current system - developed over many years and successive governments - is not fit for purpose. You wrote to me on 17 May regarding Dame Judith's final report, which calls for major reform and a change of culture, with the onus more clearly on industry to manage the risks they create at every stage and the government doing more to set and enforce high standards. The Government agrees with Dame Judith Hackitt's assessment and is committed to bringing forward legislation that delivers meaningful and lasting change. The system should be overseen by a more effective regulatory framework, including stronger powers to inspect high-rise buildings and sanctions to tackle irresponsible behaviour. We will work with partners to consider the detailed recommendations and will set out an implementation plan in the autumn.

Reform of this scale will take time and the Government, in response to public concern, considers that in addition to longer-term reform there is a case for immediate action. Next week, I intend to publish a consultation on banning the use of combustible materials on the external walls of high-rise residential buildings.

I have also consulted on significantly restricting or banning the use of “desktop studies” to assess cladding systems. Inappropriate use of desktop studies is unacceptable and I will not hesitate to ban them if the consultation – which closed on 25 May – does not demonstrate that they can be used safely. My Department is in the process of analysing the consultation response and will respond in due course. We are also working with industry to clarify Building Regulations fire safety guidance, and I will publish this for consultation in July.

I am depositing a copy of this letter in the library of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'J'.

**RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP**