

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

17 May 2018

Dear James,

Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety

I am writing with regard to the Final Report of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, which was published earlier today. As you know, the Committee heard from Dame Judith earlier today and our initial views and concerns are now on the record.

Dame Judith's review has arrived at many sensible conclusions, not least in terms of longer term reforms around the need for cultural change in the construction industry and to raise the level of competence of professionals responsible for fire safety and carrying out essential works. We also agree that residents need a more powerful voice in a rebalanced relationship with landlords and building owners, and they should have the right to access and request fundamental information about their buildings.

However, the Committee strongly disagreed with Dame Judith's decision to focus on a light-touch, outcomes-based approach to the building regulations, which shied away from more immediate steps to explicitly ban the use of combustible materials in the cladding of high-rise residential buildings. We have repeatedly made clear our view that it cannot be right to continue to permit the use of such materials on residential buildings.

It is so important that we learn the lessons of the Grenfell Tower fire. It cannot be right to place so much trust in the professional competence of a construction industry in which too many people have been inclined to take shortcuts and cut costs at the expense of the safety of residents. We need to have some prescription in our building regulations, not least with regard to the use of combustible materials.

We are therefore fully supportive of your decision to reject Dame Judith's approach to prescription, and welcome the announcement of a consultation into banning the use of combustible materials. However, we do believe that there is a strong argument for proceeding immediately with such a ban, not least so residents can be reassured that the cladding used on their homes is safe. We also trust that this consultation will cover all buildings over 18 metres in height, to which the relevant sections on cladding of the existing Approved Document B apply, and not the higher threshold of 30 metres which Dame Judith seems to have focused on in her report.

Finally, as you know, while the Committee had requested an embargoed copy of the report in order to consider it in full in advance of our evidence session with Dame Judith earlier today, this was not provided. It is therefore likely we will be writing to you further in due course once we have had more time to assess in detail all of Dame Judith's recommendations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts', written in a cursive style.

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Communities and Local Government Committee