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Dear Bob,

I was grateful for the opportunity to update the Select Committee on the work of the Department. As discussed, this letter provides a follow up for the questions I promised more clarification on.

Empty Homes Premium

With regards to the amount of councils that have used the existing latitude they have to apply the 50% increase to empty homes, I can now confirm that 291 local authorities (out of 326 billing authorities) applied an empty homes premium in 2017-18. Three of these set a premium of less than 50%; the rest set a premium of 50%.

Grants for Homes for Social Rent

On grants for homes for social rent, we recognise that developing housing associations and local authorities are awaiting guidance. Further details on how social rent will be prioritised in areas of acute affordability pressure, and how to bid for funding will be published shortly.

Viability Assessments and Deallocation of Sites

On viability assessments and the deallocation of sites, paragraph 120 of the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says that planning policies and decisions need to reflect changes in the demand for land, and so they should be informed by regular reviews of allocated land and land availability. We have set out steps to be taken to reallocate land for an alternative use, where the local authority consider there to be no reasonable prospect that the land will be developed for the allocated use.

The 'plan making' and 'decision making' chapters of the draft revised NPPF also support local authorities to set out clearer policy requirements for developer contributions in plans. This will provide clarity for developers on what is asked of them, and for communities on the infrastructure and affordable housing they will get. The reforms support local authorities to apply policies more consistently and determine applications on this basis.

London Capital Spend

I also committed to providing further information on the London Capital Spend. The Government announced at Spring Statement an additional £1.7 billion funding for the Mayor to deliver 26,000 more affordable homes in London. This has increased London's total budget for affordable housing to over £4.8 billion to deliver at least 116,000 affordable homes by March 2022. This is a clear sign that the Government recognises the acute housing problems faced in London.

The £65 million surrendered was from a loan-funding programme devolved to the Greater London Authority (GLA), which ends in March 2018. The programme is demand-led and received lower than expected level of bids, partially due to the competition with grant funding. The funding was not fully spent by the Greater London Authority so was returned to HM Treasury to support other housing programmes. This was part of good budget management within the Department, in line with established processes to ensure protection of public money. The loan-funding has been replaced by additional grant funding we have announced at recent fiscal events, of which £1.7bn is allocated to London.

Fire safety works in local authority buildings

The Committee raised the issue of fire safety works in local authority buildings. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring their buildings are safe for residents and we expect them to fund fire safety measures. However, as the Committee will be aware, we will allow financial flexibilities for local authorities who need to undertake essential fire safety work to make a building safe. If a local authority building owner considers a building to be unsafe, they will need to determine what measures are essential to make the building fire safe in each case. This will need to be done as part of a whole fire safety strategy for each individual building, taking into account expert advice, any directions or advice from the local fire and rescue service, and other fire safety measures present. The nature of the works required will depend on the circumstances of the building.

Forty one local authorities have been in touch with the department regarding our policy. Of these, thirteen told us that they have essential works to undertake, and we have asked them for further information. Four have now returned this information and we are in detailed discussions with them.

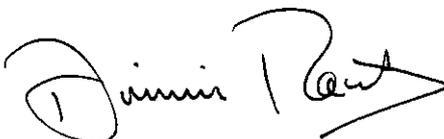
Cladding

These points are addressed in a separate letter to the committee

Grenfell Rehousing

As discussed during the Select Committee, I have attached a copy of the rehousing table (updated on 19 March).

I hope that this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely, 

DOMINIC RAAB MP

Grenfell Rehousing figures – 25 January to 19 March compared

This table compares the current key rehousing figures for Category A and B households with those from the last deep dive on 25 January.

	Category A		Category B	
	25 January (Previous deep dive)	Latest data (19 March)	25 January (Previous deep dive)	Latest data (19 March)
Total number of households	208	210 (+2)	133	128 (-5)
Number of households in permanent accommodation (in residence for Cat B)	54	62 (+8)	16	25 (+9)
Number of households in temporary accommodation	58	66 (+8)	39	67 (+28)
Number of households in emergency accommodation	96	82 (-14)	78	36 (-42)
Number of households in emergency accommodation who have accepted offers (temporary and permanent)	43	60 (+17)	18	4 (-14)
Number of households in emergency accommodation who have still not accepted offers	53	22 (-31)	60	32 (-28)