

Science Advisory Group (SAG) for the review of potential environmental contamination in Grenfell and North Kensington

Advice to Grenfell Tower Fire Ministerial Recovery Group

Minutes of Meeting #6 – 18 July 2019

Overview

At its sixth meeting, SAG: (i) discussed the progress of the Tier 1 assessment and concerns regarding the pre-specified analysis and interpretation plan, (ii) received a presentation from AECOM on Tier 1 results and (iii) discussed Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) communication plan for the community engagement event on 20th July.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. SAG regrets that it has only belatedly received the requested pre-specified analysis and interpretation plan from Public Health England (PHE) and the Environment Agency (EA) – and that it is not fit for purpose in its current form. SAG further regrets that it is yet to see a public version of this plan, and has not received a plan for communicating Tier 1 findings to the community. SAG's advice was that the pre-specified analysis plan and the public version of this should have been in the public domain before Tier 1 data became available. SAG was informed that the chair wrote to the MHCLG Secretary of State on 17 July, outlining SAG's concerns – and re-iterated these concerns directly at a ministerial meeting. SAG expect the full analysis plan to be in the public domain before the full results are delivered in September.
2. SAG received a written update from Chris Whitty regarding (i) The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) call and (ii) the suitability and take up of NHS services.
 - (i) The NIHR will issue an open research call for interdisciplinary proposals around major disasters such as Grenfell and the Manchester Arena bombing. Research questions related to Grenfell are now being considered under the aegis of both NIHR and UKRI (following the letter from the SAG chair to Sir Mark Walport).
 - (ii) Chris Whitty has spoken to Martin Machray, from NHS England. The majority of families in the Grenfell community have engaged with the NHS services. SAG agreed that issues relating to health and the initial fire are beyond the scope of SAG and are for the Department of Health and Social care (DHSC) and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) – but that SAG members with relevant health expertise can offer support via Chris Whitty in a personal capacity.
3. SAG received a summary presentation of Tier 1 results (TN 1 to 18) from AECOM, who recapped the work undertaken as desk research and sampling in Tier 1 and then presented emerging findings. SAG reviewed these key findings, which will soon be fully released to the public once final checks and sign-offs are in place. These included:
 - details on who took the samples, how contaminants were tested for, the laboratories used for various chemicals, and confirmed which chemicals had been tested with accredited laboratory methods, which comprises the main points in terms of chain of custody.

- findings for various individual contaminants including how they compare to key reference values including health screening values and urban background concentrations.
 - feedback on the contaminants that did not have reference values, highlighting whether these were detected or not. Guideline levels should be developed for comparison in Tier 2 where these contaminants are of concern.
4. The Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) indicated that what he has seen of AECOM's work so far has been satisfactory and he was able to assure quality. The pilot study has been useful and should be brought together with the preliminary risk assessment of exploratory sampling data, in the final report and proposal for Tier 2.
 5. SAG agreed that AECOM's work is methodologically sound and the scope is adequate. Samples have been analysed in quality-controlled laboratories and SAG has confidence in the measurement data. Given the evidence SAG has seen to date, it is content with the conclusions AECOM has made. SAG will reserve ultimate judgement until it has seen the final risk assessment for Tier 1 and any additional interpretation by the relevant Government agencies.
 6. SAG recommended to MHCLG that, at the community meeting on 20th July, the community should receive headline messages – with a clear timeline for when all results and associated explanations will be made fully available. Ultimately all data and analysis should be made public as per SAG's previous recommendations.

List of actions

ACTION 6.1: SAG secretariat to update Anthony Newman-Taylor's register of interests on gov.uk.

ACTION 6.2: Len Levy to share an MRC IEH report on asbestos with SAG members and AECOM (via SAG secretariat).

ACTION 6.3: SAG secretariat to provide a statement of its judgement for use in public communications.

ACTION 6.4: MHCLG to draw on SAG expertise – especially Alex Freeman and James Rubin – in developing plans for the Grenfell community meeting this Saturday.

In attendance

Sir Patrick Vallance, chair

Dr Paul Nathanail (Suitably Qualified Person)

Prof Sir Anthony Newman Taylor

Prof Len Levy

Simon Cole, AECOM

Suzanne Kochanowski, MHCLG

Tom Fairchild, MHCLG

Government Office for Science secretariat

Dialling in:

Prof John Warner

Prof Sir Munir Pirmohamed

Dr Alexandra Freeman

Prof Andrew Curran, Health and Safety Executive (in his capacity as Chief Scientific Adviser)

Prof Robert Mokaya

Apologies

Prof Ragnar Löfstedt
Dr James Rubin
Dr Lindsay Bramwell
Prof Chris Whitty (in his capacity as Deputy Chief Medical Officer)
Prof Anna Stec