



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government

By email

Jeremy Pocklington CB
Permanent Secretary

**Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local
Government**
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16 December 2020

Dear Robert,

£30m FUND FOR ALARMS IN UNSAFE BUILDINGS

1. You and I remain very concerned about the plight of residents in buildings which have been constructed with cladding materials which accelerate the spread of fire. We both agree that these buildings must be remediated as quickly as possible.
2. The £1.6bn public funding that we are providing is speeding up the remediation of high rise residential buildings with unsafe cladding. It is this funding which will have the greatest impact on the safety and wellbeing of residents in affected buildings.
3. I know that you are concerned by the plight of leaseholders facing continued high costs of interim measures pending remediation, and especially the high costs of waking watch. Whilst waking watch - when established and operated in accordance with NFCC guidance - is an acceptable risk mitigation strategy, NFCC's guidance is also clear that alarms are preferable to waking watch on the grounds of both safety and, especially, cost efficiency.
4. To support leaseholders facing the costs of waking watch, the department has considered options to encourage the installation of a common alarm system in these unsafe buildings. You have concluded, based on the department's analysis and advice, that you want the government to step in to provide £30m funding for the installation of a common alarm system to reduce dependence on costly waking watch in buildings with unsafe cladding.

Compliance with *Managing Public Money*

5. I understand the rationale for intervention. However, as Accounting Officer, I have a duty to ensure compliance with the public accounting rules as set out in *Managing Public Money*.
6. As I and my predecessor have found when the department announced previous funding for building safety programmes, the rules in *Managing Public Money* do not

support this kind of exceptional intervention. In the normal course of events, these costs would be borne by the private sector, and waking watch costs are currently being met by leaseholders. This approach, therefore, does not meet the *Managing Public Money* test for value for money.

7. I will therefore require your written direction to proceed. I will then ensure that all necessary steps are taken to carry this out without delay.

8. As is required, I will alert the Comptroller and Auditor General, and I will also write to the Chairs of the Public Accounts Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee. It will then be for the Committees to decide whether to investigate the matter further, for example by holding a hearing in Parliament.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy Pocklington". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

JEREMY POCKLINGTON