



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

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Dear Colleague,

I am writing to update Hon. Members of both Houses on the Grenfell Tower disaster and the action we are taking in response.

### **Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Recovery Taskforce**

After failings in the initial response by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on the ground became quickly apparent, the Grenfell Response Team was put in charge of recovery efforts. The team, led by John Barradell, and supported by colleagues from across the public sector, has improved the response but we also need to plan ahead for what happens after the initial emergency response has concluded.

That is why the Government is intervening by setting up the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council.

The job of the Taskforce will be to provide assurance to me and strategic support to RBKC. It will be independent of the council, but will work alongside them to make sure that they have the capacity, capability, and governance to allocate the right resources to take on the longer term recovery work beyond the immediate Civil Emergency Response.

The Taskforce will report to me directly, and will be made up of experienced and senior people with a track record in delivery, including from local government. I will announce details of the chair and membership of the Taskforce shortly. The Taskforce will be in place for as long as is required.

It will consider all aspects of the recovery operation but will have a special focus on housing, regeneration and community engagement. It will also consider the governance of the council and the way that it operates to ensure it is able to provide effective leadership through trying and difficult circumstances. And it is also essential that the

Taskforce understands the views of survivors, their families and the wider community. The Government will positively consider any further requests for assistance by the council.

The Taskforce will give a view on the capacity of the council to undertake its longer term recovery role. Alongside the Taskforce, my Department will continue to work with the new leadership of RBKC to help them get the practical assistance and support they need to deliver the right services for survivors and wider community.

I believe this is the right course of action at this stage, working with the elected council that has now asked for our support, rather than overriding it. Of course, should the Taskforce or others present me with evidence of systemic failure, then the Government could still choose to conduct a statutory inspection. Nothing should or will get in the way of providing the services and support that local residents left devastated by this tragedy need and deserve.

## **Rehousing**

A key part of the ongoing support efforts is the work to rehouse those who have lost their homes. We want to help families move on from temporary accommodation as quickly as possible, which is why the Prime Minister promised that, by 5 July, we would make an offer of temporary housing to all those who lost their homes as a result of the fire.

The Housing Minister, Alok Sharma, gave a statement on this commitment on 5 of July and I can now give you a further update. As of 7 July, 167 families have been identified as in need of a new home. This has increased as housing officers have continued to work with families, and some, especially those who had been living in overcrowded accommodation, have decided they would rather split into separate groups – a decision that we will respect. Of these families, 159 are ready to talk to the housing team. These families have been offered a good-quality, fully-furnished home where they can live, rent free, while permanent accommodation is found.

For a variety of reasons, some families are not yet ready to engage with the process. We fully respect that and will continue to go at the pace they want to go at.

The housing team have identified 211 good quality properties so that residents can have a choice where to live. All the properties have been inspected by the housing team to ensure they are in good condition. I met with one of the providers and went to see an example property to assure myself of that. All of them are also either in Kensington and Chelsea or a neighbouring borough.

As of 7 July, 16 offers of temporary accommodation had been accepted, and four families have already moved in. I expect this number to increase, but we must respect the pace at which the families want to move, and that some are reluctant to take up these

offers. Some may choose to remain in hotels until they have an offer of a permanent tenancy.

There are many reasons for this. Some, for instance, may want to remain in hotels near to medical treatment for their family, while others may wish to consider each offer over a longer period of time following the traumatic experience. There are also families who, perfectly understandably, are mistrustful that the housing will be genuinely temporary, with some having been told that about their home in Grenfell Tower, and then years later still living there.

We will continue to work to earn their trust, and give every assurance we can that permanent housing will be made available. Ultimately though, the pace must be driven by what victims want. We will keep offering new homes to families until they are happy to accept one, but nobody will be forced into a home that they do not want to move in to.

In the longer term, as the Prime Minister has said, everyone whose home was destroyed by the fire will be guaranteed a new home on the same terms as the one they lost. This means paying the same rent, with the same level of tenancy security and in the same area for those who want it.

As has already been announced this will include a new block of social housing that will provide 68 new homes in Kensington Row, where work is going on round the clock to get homes ready as quickly as possible. Each home will be fully furnished and completed to a high specification. The developer, St Edward, will also provide liaison staff for each block so that residents are fully supported in settling in to their new homes.

We are urgently working with a number of developers to secure similar properties, either in Kensington and Chelsea or very close to North Kensington, so families can stay in the same area. This of course must be driven by families' needs and we will work with RBKC to ensure this happens.

### **The testing program**

In addition to the rehousing effort we are also continuing to work to address the safety concerns that have been raised by this tragedy. As I said in my letter on 22 June, we have asked local authorities and other registered providers of social housing to identify whether any similar buildings in their area have external cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM), and return a full assessment of the buildings in their area to us.

We provided advice to all social landlords on 22 June about interim safety measures that should be taken immediately where it has been determined that a building has ACM cladding that does not meet the test of limited combustibility. This includes checking the insulation. This guidance was recommended by independent experts and includes

advice arising from the emerging findings from the Metropolitan Police investigation into the Grenfell Tower blaze.

The limited combustibility screening programme for ACM cladding is running around the clock at the Building Research Establishment (BRE), and is able to test up to 100 samples a day. As of 8 July, cladding samples from 208 high rise residential buildings over 18 metres tall have not passed the limited combustibility test, as have samples from four NHS buildings, though these are not buildings where patients stay overnight.

The testing facilities have also been made available to private sector landlords who may have ACM, and we have asked all such landlords of high-rise with ACM cladding to send samples for a screening test.

We have asked landlords for all the affected buildings to inform tenants and implement the interim safety measures needed. In the meantime, landlords and local authorities are in contact with fire and rescue services in their area to conduct fire risk assessments of all such tower blocks.

### **System testing**

As the next step in this process, following advice from the Expert Advisory Panel, the Government announced on Thursday that it will commission a set of 6 large-scale tests to help establish how different wall systems – including cladding and insulation – behave in a fire.

The further tests, which build on the current testing, will look at three different types of ACM cladding combined with different types of commonly-used insulation. This will be based on the fire performance criteria for cladding systems set out in the Building Regulations guidance, Approved Document B, in line with the panel's advice.

To carry out this testing nine metre demonstration walls are being built with complete cladding systems, including panels and insulation, and then subjected to a fire that replicates a severe fire in a flat breaking out of a window. This assesses whether the fire will spread up the outside wall.

The results of these tests will help landlords make decisions on any further measures that may need to be put in place to make their buildings safe. The tests, which will run alongside the existing panel testing programme, will be undertaken by the BRE as a matter of urgency and will not require any new samples to be taken from buildings that have already been tested. The results will be made publicly available.

In addition, the Expert Advisory Panel recommended issuing further practical advice on immediate steps landlords can take to identify their wall materials including insulation. This will be published as soon as possible.

### **Support for victims**

While we continue to work as quickly as possible to ensure the safety of similar buildings around the country, our priority remains supporting the victims of this tragedy. Our current support, which we keep under review, includes:

- **A £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents Discretionary Fund**, including guaranteed payments of £5,000 into bank accounts for each household and £500 cash for individuals who have permanently lost their home to help meet immediate needs, such as food and clothing.
- **Staff from six Government departments at the Westway Assistance Centre** who continue to provide direct support to victims and volunteers.
- **My Department's Grenfell Tower Victims Unit**, which is a single point of access to Government for workers supporting those affected.
- **Key workers** for all those in Grenfell Tower and Grenfell walk, to act as a single point of contact and coordinate the support from individual specialist services.
- **A Family and Friends Assistance Centre** has been established to provide additional specialist support to those who lost loved ones in the fire.
- **£1 million of support for the charitable response**, bolstering the extraordinary work in the locally-led recovery efforts that have been made by charities and not-for profits. This will be administered by a consortium of independent trusts and charities, and be co-ordinated by London Funders.
- **Utility companies' support for victims**, cancelling outstanding debts from water and energy companies, and committing not to put residents on a higher tariff if they move home.
- **Additional support for families with children over the summer**, with government support for the voluntary sector to arrange activities and support for children over the summer holidays.
- **DWP support for victims to ensure benefits aren't affected**, including a disregard for support payments to ensure that means-tested welfare entitlements aren't reduced by support payments. There is also dedicated enquiry line, DWP staff at the Westway centre, and work being done to make sure benefits aren't affected in cases where medical evidence was due to expire or a Work Capability Assessment was due.

In addition to this support, we want to address issues that may be discouraging victims, or those aware of others who were in Grenfell Tower at the time of the fire from coming forward. That's why we announced guidance from the Director of Public Prosecutions not to prosecute tenants at Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk for unlawful subletting. This would apply when any individual comes forward with information for the authorities about those who were in their flats on the night of the fire.

We also want to ensure that worries about immigration status are not stopping people from coming forward. The Home Office has announced new guidance to grant leave outside the Immigration Rules for 12 months to those directly affected by the Grenfell Tower fire. This will apply to those who need to regularise their immigration status in

the UK or obtain a change in the conditions of their existing leave, or whose existing leave to remain is due to expire within 12 months of the announcement.

This guidance is intended as a short-term policy to provide support and stability whilst those directly affected by the fire deal with its immediate aftermath.

The Home Office have emphasised that they will not be using the tragedy as a reason to carry out immigration checks on those involved or those providing vital information to identify victims. They will also make sure that all victims, irrespective of their immigration status, will be able to access the services they need, including accommodation and healthcare.

I hope that this gives you reassurance about the scale of the Government response to this disaster, of our offer of support to those affected, and our efforts to ensure the fire safety of all residences going forward. The scale and nature of the tragedy means that the situation on the ground continues to develop day-by-day. My ministerial team and I are determined to provide continued support for, and engagement with, those affected and we stand ready to respond where they need any further assistance.

I appreciate this is a matter of great concern to Hon. Members of both Houses, and will continue to update Members – both through letters and in oral and written statements – as soon as possible when I have new information to share.

This is a national tragedy on a scale that is hard to imagine. The harrowing accounts I have heard from families are all the more tragic for the fact that this should have not been possible. Let me assure you I will continue do everything in my power to prevent something like this from ever happening again, and to help those who have suffered such unspeakable trauma.

If you have any immediate concerns, or are aware of any cases where people are not getting the support they are owed and have been promised, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will personally ensure it is addressed.

**THE RT HON SAJID JAVID MP**