



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

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To all MPs

Work to care for survivors of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the wider Building Safety Programme

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to give you an update on the work to care for the survivors of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the wider programme of building safety measures we have implemented in its wake.

Rehousing

As you will be aware, 151 homes were lost to the fire. Every household from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk who was ready to engage with the process and in a position to move was offered a temporary home within three weeks of the tragedy. Some of the surviving families, particularly those with more than one generation of adults, have now asked that they be given the opportunity to divide into smaller household units, which means that the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea are currently looking to find new homes for 203 households.

The latest figures I have from the Council are that 112 households have accepted an offer of either temporary or permanent accommodation. Of these, 63 have now moved in; 45 households into temporary accommodation, and 18 households into permanent accommodation.

As I have explained in the House, particular priority is being given to those families which had suffered bereavement, and we are very clear that survivors must not be

rushed or pressurised into making decisions on their new homes. Equally, once they have accepted an offer, the council are making sure that they have the space in which to make choices on matters that will help them to rebuild their lives. I want to see people able to leave hotels; but I want to be sure that they are fully comfortable with the permanent homes into which they will move.

The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea is focussing on identifying local properties so that survivors can remain in the area over the long-term if that is what they wish. The latest figures I have show that the council have secured over 250 properties. In addition, a number of survivors have asked that the temporary accommodation which has been found for them should be converted into their permanent residence, and the Council is working with the relevant landlords to make this happen wherever possible. The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has said that rehousing Grenfell survivors continues to be a priority and plan to spend an additional £155 million on buying and building homes in the borough. This is on top of the £80 million they have already reported spending on efforts to help those in need.

The work to rehouse survivors is led by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, but it is an issue on which my Department tracks progress rigorously. We must always remember that the true measure of success is not to be found in statistics, which may fluctuate as victims accept offers – and sometimes change their minds – but in them finally feeling comfortable in a new home from which they can begin to rebuild their lives. This on-going work underpins the Prime Minister’s commitment to survivors that we will endeavour to support the Council in offering permanent new homes for all within 12 months of the fire.

Mental health and emotional support

Those who survived the fire suffered an unimaginably traumatic experience; NHS experts estimate that 50% or more may be expected to display symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result. There is also significant risk for nearby residents who were close witnesses. We are therefore taking especial care to ensure that support is available to whoever needs it, whenever they need it.

This is a response that brings together expertise and resource from the Government and NHS, the Council, and the voluntary and charity sectors. NHS teams are providing screening for PTSD – over 500 people have been screened to date – referring to specialist care those who need it. In addition to the NHS 24-hour helpline, support services are available through the Community Assistance Centre at Bard Road, and NHS and charity workers provide emotional support and counselling through the night, based at the Notting Hill Methodist Church and at a number of hotels where survivors are being accommodated.

Given the particular potential impact on children involved in the disaster, the Council is working closely with schools in the Borough and neighbouring areas to ensure that they

are all fully aware of the range of assistance available, and Educational Psychologists have visited schools in the area.

The Kensington Aldridge Academy is now housed on a temporary school site on the Parade Ground (Scrubs Lane) next to Burlington Danes Academy. The Department for Education's Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) worked closely with our contractors to complete what we understand is one of the fastest school building projects in the country's history. The school opened on its temporary site as scheduled on Monday 18th September (attended by Justine Greening, MP).

I am working closely with Nick Hurd MP, who has been asked by the Prime Minister to be Minister for Grenfell Victims, in addition to his Home Office responsibilities. I want to thank him for the work he has taken forward to engage with the community and advocate on behalf of victims.

Immigration

We have reflected on the concerns raised about the immigration status of some Grenfell residents, and since the initial Grenfell Tower immigration policy of granting 12 months' leave to remain was announced, we have been planning for the future of those residents affected by these unprecedented events and listening to their feedback, as well as the views of Sir Martin Moore-Bick.

The Government believes it is right to provide this specific group of survivors greater certainty over their long-term future in the UK; subject to their continued eligibility and the necessary security and criminality checks being met. I would draw your attention to the further decision recently announced by the Immigration Minister that there will be a dedicated immigration route to permanent residency for those survivors granted this 12 months' leave to remain. This policy will enable survivors to apply – for free – for two further periods of two years' limited leave. After these five years, they will then be able to apply for permanent residence. Those granted leave will continue to have full access to public funds and rights to work in the UK. In addition, the Home Office has established a dedicated policy for the relatives of survivors or victims, which will allow them to extend their stay in the UK for up to six months' from the date of entry.

Building safety

Turning to the wider national implications arising from the fire, the building safety programme which we established continues to make good progress in ensuring the safety of residents in high-rise buildings. As an update to the Statement I gave in the House on 11 October, the number of social housing high-rises in England with aluminium composite material cladding is 169 buildings, of which the large-scale system tests conducted by the Building Research Establishment indicate that 161 are unlikely to meet current Building Regulation guidance for buildings over 18 metres in height.

The focus of current work is now on supporting remediation work in those buildings with cladding that poses a fire risk. Additionally, we are improving our understanding of the situation for privately owned high-rise residential buildings with ACM cladding. Private owners are in the process of submitting cladding samples from such buildings in England for testing, of which 86 have been judged to have failed under the criteria of the large-scale systems tests. We have been working across Government to also understand the situation in public buildings (such as hospitals and schools) in England – 15 have ACM cladding, all of which have failed under the criteria of the large-scale systems tests.

The Department for Education has contacted all bodies responsible for safety in schools, instructing them to carry out checks to identify any buildings which may require further investigation. The department is continuing to work closely with two schools identified with ACM cladding of concern to support them and ensure all the necessary steps are taken to ensure the continued safety of the buildings. All schools have to follow strict fire safety regulations designed to ensure they are safe and well prepared in the event of fire.

My Department is working closely with local authorities, major developers and large commercial organisations, such as hotel chains, to seek to identify other buildings which should be tested. We have made additional funding available to local authorities under the New Burdens policy to help facilitate this data-gathering exercise.

Dame Judith Hackitt is meanwhile pursuing the independent review into building and fire safety regulation which the Home Secretary and I commissioned. Her request for public and industry contributions closed on Friday, and we expect an interim report from her by the end of the year. I will keep you fully informed of her findings.

Finally, I must address the issue of financial assistance for local authorities and housing associations in carrying out remediation work on buildings with identified risks. Fire safety is the responsibility of the building owner. If the local authority building owner, following expert advice, considers a building to be unsafe, they will need to determine what measures are essential to make the building fire safe, taking into account recommendations or requirements set by the Fire and Rescue Service. For example, the decision on whether to install sprinklers is a decision for each building owner, and they should consider advice from fire safety experts, taking into account the specific building in question.

We have been clear with councils and housing associations that we expect them to fund measures that they determine to be essential to make a building fire safe, having taken into account any recommendations or requirements set by the Fire and Rescue Service, and should draw on existing resources to do so. However, if councils have concerns, they should get in touch with us; we will consider the removal of financial restrictions, where these stand in the way of essential work being done. Housing associations that

are concerned about their ability to meet these costs should contact the social housing regulator.

Thus far, 32 local authorities have expressed concern in principle to us. We have liaised more closely with seven of these, and one of them has now submitted supporting evidence for consideration by my Department.

I hope the above is helpful; in the aftermath of such a tragic event, we all need to work together in a non-partisan spirit to ensure the survivors receive the care and assistance they deserve, and that we take the necessary steps to avoid anything like this happening again. I will continue to write regularly to you to provide updates, and, with Mr Speaker's permission, will of course offer Oral Statements when necessary.

I will place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Javid', with a small comma at the end.

THE RT HON SAJID JAVID MP