

GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

Attack: *This tragedy is a result of austerity and cuts to Fire Services.*

- First of all, I wish to commend the brave and heroic actions of those firefighters and emergency responders who attended yesterday's scene.
- This is an unprecedented, dreadful tragedy.
- But we should recognise that there are reasons to be positive over improvements in fire safety.
- The number of fire incidents has halved in the last decade.
 - Over the past 10 years there has been a 52 per cent decrease in the total number of reported fires and a 22 per cent decrease in the number of fire related fatalities.
- And we believe that fire and rescue services have the resources they need to continue to do their important work.
- This was demonstrated during yesterday's tragic incident which has been attended by around 350 firefighters, with the first crew arriving at the scene within six minutes.

Attack: *Why have you cut 7,000 firefighters? Doesn't this make it far more difficult to respond to fires such as this?*

- Nothing is more important than keeping the public safe.
- And we recognise the vital and heroic role firefighters continue to play in protecting communities.
- This was demonstrated during yesterday's tragic incident which was attended by over 350 firefighters, with the first crew arriving at the scene within six minutes.
- We should recognise that demand on the service is falling – the number of fire incidents has halved in the last decade.
- Whereas the number of firefighters has fallen by less than 20 per cent.
- And it is the responsibility of each fire and rescue authority to manage their resources across prevention, protection and operational response to meet local risk.
- These decisions are based on the professional advice of chief fire officers, and made in consultation with local communities.

Background – Key Facts

Year	No. of firefighters in England (fte)	No. of firefighters in London (fte)	No. of fire incidents in England	No. of fire incidents in London	Total net expenditure for Fire Services in England (£bn)	Total net expenditure for Fire Services in London (£bn)
2005/06	41,917	5,953	336,107	39,119	-	-
2010/11	41,171	5,783	228,383	27,529	£2.165	£0.412
2015/16	34,395	4,821	162,223	20,784	£1.983	£0.370

Attack: *But it is taking longer for fire crews to get to these incidents, isn't it?*

- It's important to emphasise just how well the fire and emergency services responded to the Grenwell tragedy
- They were at the scene within just six minutes of the first call. So there's no question of response times in this case
- Response times are affected by a huge number of factors including how much information fire call centres are now processing
- But crucially, the number of fire incidents and casualties have recently reached historically low levels, and the amount of damage caused by fire has decreased

Background

- The average response time for a dwelling fire was 7.7 minutes in 2015-16, compared to 7.4 minutes in 2009-10. (*Home Office, Fire Statistics Table 1002*)

Attack: *The Government say cuts aren't the issue and demand for the fire service has lessened, but the latest figures (2014-15 – 2015-16) show the number of fires rising by 7 percent, and deaths up by 15 percent*

- Public safety is our first concern
- We've seen an overall improvement in fire safety and that's a testament to the expertise of the fire and rescue authorities and brave emergency responders
- The nature of these tragedies is that they don't follow a pattern and the number of deaths fluctuates each year
- Over the past 10 years there has been a 52 per cent decrease in the total number of fires attended by fire and rescue services.
- And the 2010-2015 Parliament saw the lowest number of fire fatalities on record
- But of course every loss of life from fire is one too many, and that's why Government Departments continue their efforts working with local and fire authorities to improve safety

Attack: *Why has the Government/Gavin Barwell 'sat' on a fire safety review? Why has the guidance review been delayed?*

- It is simply not true to say anyone has 'sat' on a fire safety review.
- Following the Lakanal House fire, the coroner recommended the fire safety guidance within the Building Regulations was simplified.
- And this work is ongoing with our priority making sure we have the highest possible standards.
- Fire safety requirements are complex and it is important we get this right.
- A lot of preparatory work has been completed, including commissioning and undertaking research.
- And we are now working to produce a consultation on relevant issues.

Attack: How has this happened again after the 2009 Lakanal House fire?

- At this stage it would be wrong to speculate on the causes of this fire and the consequences of it.
- There are already rigorous standards that landlords must meet, whether in private rental or for social housing.
- Clearly there needs to be a thorough investigation to find out what has happened here - and we will make sure that happens.

Attack: But it's been 8 years since Lakanhal. Why hasn't the Government followed the recommendations from the 2013 Coroner's report?

- We have to let the fire authorities do their job and work from the facts when we have them
- After the fire at Lakanal House in 2009 DCLG wrote to social landlords alerting them to specific problems associated with the fire there
- The Government published updated guidance on fighting fires in high rise buildings (Feb 2014) – as recommended by the Coroner's Report

If needed:

DCLG:

- Published new fire safety guidance in purpose-built flat blocks in 2011
- Commissioned research into technical issues associated with building regulations and fire in 2012;
- And commissioned a review of standards relating to fire safety for schemes via which organisations can self-certify compliance with Building Regulations in 2013.
- Work is also ongoing to simplify the fire safety guidance relating to Building Regulations, and our priority is to make sure we have the highest possible standards.

Background

- In March 2013, the coroner into the inquest of the Lakanal House fire recommended that the Government simplified fire safety guidance within the building regulations, known as Approved Document B.
- The then Communities Secretary Eric Pickles responded in May 2013 confirming that Government would review and have simplified guidance in place by 2016/17.
- Since then we have commissioned a user survey to support this programme of simplification of the building regulations, published in February 2017.

Attack: *Didn't the Coroner recommend strengthening Building Regulation standards?*

- No. The coroner's recommendations were related to simplifying the fire safety guidance, not a recommendation to increase standards.
- Again it's too early to speculate on what caused the fire or how it spread.
- But if this is down to faulty upgrades then that is down to a failure to meet existing standards - not a lack of standards.
- There are already rigorous standards that landlords must meet, whether in private rental or for social housing.
- Clearly there needs to be a thorough investigation to find out what has happened here - and we will make sure that happens.

Attack: *Why aren't sprinklers retro-fitted into high-rise buildings? Brandon Lewis admitted automatic sprinklers save lives, but said it was not the government's responsibility to encourage developers to fit them?*

- It's too early to speculate on what caused the fire or how it spread, and we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that sprinklers would have prevented this terrible tragedy.
- Sprinklers are required for all new high rise flats built since 2007, but an appropriate level of fire safety can be achieved without the need to retrofit sprinklers.
- There are already rigorous standards that landlords must meet, whether in private rental or for social housing.
- Clearly there needs to be a thorough investigation to find out what has happened here - and we will make sure that happens.

***Attack:** Corbyn tried to pass through a law that would require private landlords to make their homes safe and “fit for human habitation” last year – but it was rejected by the Government. Labour proposed an amendment to the Government’s new Housing and Planning Bill. The Government claimed the new law would result in “unnecessary regulation”, why?*

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- Clearly there needs to be a thorough investigation to find out what has happened here - and we will make sure that happens.

If needed

- We have a robust system in place.
- The Housing Health and Safety Rating System assesses the health and safety risk in all residential properties, and under the Housing Act 2004, following an inspection local authorities can issue the landlord with an improvement notice or a hazard awareness notice.
- In extreme circumstances, the local authority may decide to make the repairs itself, or to prohibit that property from being rented out.

Background

- The Government opposed Karen Buck’s Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Private Members Bill on the grounds that it would result in unnecessary further regulation.
- This is because of the existing framework that provides local authorities with strong powers to require landlords to make necessary improvements to a property.

GRENFELL TOWER FIRE BACKGROUND

Accurate as of 8:00am, 15th June

Operational response

- At 00:55 on 14th June, London Fire Brigade (LFB) mobilised to a fire at Grenfell Tower, Latimer Road, a 24 story residential tower block that consists of 120 flats. The cause of the fire has not been confirmed.
- LFB have declared this a major incident. They responded to the incident with around 70 vehicles at the scene and around 350 firefighters. MPS also sent around 120 officers to the scene.
- A rapid search has been carried out up the central stairwell up to the top floor of the block. This is not a thorough search as there is still considerable smouldering and internal collapse. From this search it is considered that there will be no further saveable life. A full search is unlikely to be feasible for some time.
- A specialist team is being brought in today to assess shoring up of the building.
 - *Note: this would involve substantial costs. London Fire Brigade will be seeking funds if it is considered this is the right course of action*

Human impact

- The number of residents likely to have been in the building at the time of the fire is still unclear.
- 17 fatalities have been publicly confirmed publically. Internally (and not for public use), we are aware of more than 20 confirmed fatalities, but the final number could be significantly higher.
- There are 34 patients admitted to five of London's hospitals, with 18 in critical care.
- 200 people (including the people who have been evacuated from surrounding buildings) are currently in Rest Centres. The Salvation Army are coordinating donation centres for clothes and other essentials.
- Vulnerable people and families have been given accommodation overnight in a hotel as a priority. This includes 44 families from the tower and 25 from the surrounding area. However, there is still a shortfall of accommodation.