



Members Room
Southwark Town Hall
Peckham Road
London SE5 8UB

Rt Hon John Denham MP
Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government
Department for Communities & Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

6 July 2009

Dear John,

You will no doubt be aware of the tragic fire which broke out on July 3rd in Lakanal House on the Sceaux Gardens Estate in Camberwell, London Borough of Southwark, leading to the loss of six lives. This has proved to be one of the most serious tower block fires in the UK of recent decades in terms of loss of life.

Since the disaster at Lakanal House, concerns have been raised regarding the ability of the building, and those of a similar design, to cope with a major fire. In particular, serious questions have been asked regarding the number and accessibility of exits from the building. Southwark Council owns a number of other residential blocks of identical or similar design to Lakanal House and, given the policies of the era in which it was constructed, it seems very likely that other local authorities and housing bodies will own buildings of this type. I am aware that residents in the Southwark buildings of a similar type are now deeply concerned as to their own safety in the event of a fire.

We are sure that, like ourselves, you will be eager for lessons to be learnt from the events in Camberwell, in particular those which could improve the safety of residents in similar blocks. We welcome your decision to ask Sir Ken Knight to report back to you urgently on early findings regarding the fire. Sir Ken's work will undoubtedly be an important first step in ascertaining any immediate steps that need to be taken in regards to similar blocks. However, the Labour Group on Southwark Council believe that the scale and nature of the events at Lakanal House mean that these lessons need to be learnt on a national level.

We are therefore, on behalf of the Labour Group, asking that you appoint, at the earliest possible opportunity, an independent expert to conduct a full, public inquiry into the Lakanal House disaster. We understand that the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has also called for a full inquiry into the fire. Whilst it is likely that Southwark Council will seek to conduct an enquiry through its own structures, it is probable that this will lack the technical expertise required in order to ensure that the appropriate conclusions are reached. An inquiry that has been constituted at national level is also more likely to have the authority necessary to ensure that



any recommendations are pursued by local authorities and housing bodies across the country.

The Southwark Labour Group intends to seek cross-party support for a full public inquiry at a Council Assembly meeting to be held on Wednesday 7th July.

We very much hope that you will be able to provide an assurance that an independent public inquiry will be held into this tragedy. Such an inquiry would help to allay the concerns of those living in similar buildings and be of great assistance to local authorities in pursuing their duty of care towards residents.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Peter John
Leader, Southwark Labour Group

Cllr Ian Wingfield
Shadow Executive Member for Housing