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Dr Phyllis

FIRE AT LAKANAL HOUSE, CAMBERWELL

Thank you for your letter of 8 July, regarding the tragic fire at Lakanal House, which resulted in the death of six residents. I have been receiving regular updates on these sad events and keeping under review any action that may need to be taken.

In your letter you say that you consider that a public inquiry should be put in place as soon as possible to ascertain the causes of the blaze, why it spread so quickly, whether fire and rescue service procedures need modifying, and whether additional safety measures need to be put in place in similar residential blocks in the future. I agree entirely that the questions you raise need to be answered.

Currently there are two major investigations underway. One is being led by the Metropolitan Police Service, and the other by London Fire Brigade. I have asked the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, Sir Ken Knight, to provide an independent overview of progress with the fire investigations into the fire and to report back on progress and emerging findings as a matter of urgency, in case of any implications for current national guidance and procedures. Also as you will be aware, the Coroner's Inquest, which opened on Wednesday 15 July, will be looking at the facts surrounding the deaths. I have appointed Counsel given the level of public concern raised by this incident. Counsel attended the opening of the Inquest, and made clear that I was keen that any lessons learned would be acted upon. Counsel also offered any assistance officials in my Department could give.

At this stage, I am therefore keeping an open mind about the need for a public inquiry.

You will be interested to know, that to keep people up to date with developments, I have established a separate web page on the Communities and Local Government website. On this page we have a range of guidance on fire safety for residents, tenants and landlords, as well as details as to what Communities is doing in response to this event. You will also see copies of letters written to all Chief Executives and Heads of Housing in all English local authorities, and also English Chief Fire Officers and chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities, concerning the issues raised by the fire.

I do hope that the measures I have set in train indicate my determination not only to act quickly, but to operate in a truly transparent manner.

I hope that this is helpful, and I stand ready to answer any other questions you and the Committee may have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Denham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN DENHAM