



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

Councillor Ian Wingfield
Deputy Leader of the Council
and Cabinet Member for Housing
Cabinet Suite
Southwark Council
P.O. Box 64529
London
SE1P 5LX

Mark Prisk MP
Minister for Housing

**Department for Communities and Local
Government**

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: [REDACTED]
Fax: [REDACTED]
E-Mail: mark.prisk@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dclg

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Thank you for your letter of 29 May to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP about meeting the Coroner's recommendations on the inspection of flats and maisonettes (including leasehold properties) and the retrofitting of sprinklers, following the inquest into the tragic fire at Lakanal House. I have been asked to reply as residential leasehold issues fall within my Ministerial responsibilities, and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

You ask whether the government can provide guidance to enable landlords to gain easy access to all of the properties they manage, in order to ensure the health and safety of all tenants. You suggest that the law as it stands undermines a landlord's ability to enforce improvements (i.e. the retrofitting of sprinklers) in respect of flats sold under the Right to Buy which are now leasehold properties.

I recognise that local authorities face particular challenges when dealing with the mixed nature of their housing stock and that, in light of the Lakanal House fire, health and safety matters are of pressing concern for Southwark Council. The *Housing Act 1985* ("the 1985 Act") specifies certain common provisions to be included in a conveyance or grant under the Right to Buy. The 1985 Act also allows the conveyance or grant to include other covenants and conditions which are reasonable in the circumstances.

When drawing up new leases, it is therefore prudent for a landlord to consider what reasonable access may be required, and to seek appropriate independent advice on the reasonableness of any such covenant.

In 2011, the Local Government Association (LGA) published national guidance, developed by the sector, specifically on fire safety in purpose-built flats, including high-rise ones. This project was funded by DCLG and fulfils the Secretary of State's duty under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to ensure that appropriate guidance is available. Following the inquests into the tragic deaths at Lakanal House the LGA together with the key parties involved in the development of the guidance have considered whether any revision of the guidance would be helpful to address the issues raised by the Coroner in her rule 43 letter. The Secretary of State's response to the Coroner's Rule 43 report supported this approach. I understand that the responses received from these parties indicate that the sector is satisfied

that the guidance remains appropriate. It will, of course, continue to be available on the LGA website.

Landlords must make their own decisions on the retrofitting of sprinklers in properties, based on risk assessments and on the most appropriate way of dealing with any risks identified.

MARK PRISK MP