

*Southwark*  
Council

*MP*  
*Lakanal House*  
*Sprinklers*  
*SB: Bob*  
*Ledsome*

**Our Ref: IW-2204/lj**  
**29<sup>th</sup> May, 2013**

**The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP**  
**Secretary of State**  
**Department for Communities and Local**  
**Government**  
**6/B2 Eland House**  
**Bressenden Place**  
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**Councillor Ian Wingfield**  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**  
**and Cabinet Member for Housing**  
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for Brunswick Park Ward

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*Dear Secretary of State,*

**RE: LAKANAL INQUEST RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LANDLORDS OF LEASEHOLD PROPERTIES**

You will be aware of the recent inquest into the tragic fire at Lakanal House and the recommendations for Southwark council, and the London Fire Brigade and Department for Communities and Local Government, to address the failures, which contributed to the deaths of six people. The council accepts all of the coroner's recommendations and is keen to respond swiftly however at this point in time progression of the full suite of recommendations is not possible. I am writing to you therefore to ask for the government's assistance in dismantling the legal obstacles that affect all social landlords responsible for a mixed portfolio of tenanted properties and leasehold properties, which have been sold under the right to buy.

I enclose a copy of the council's response to the Coroner's Rule 43 letter. You will see that many of the recommendations have been completed by the council, not least because of the dedicated fire safety team which already coordinates the council's landlord responsibilities for fire safety. Others are of national significance for all landlords of social rented property and as such, require a coordinated response in partnership with other housing providers, government and the expert advice of strategic fire authorities.

Firstly, the coroner recommended that the council should identify when individual flats or maisonettes should be inspected and how these should be selected for inspection. Whilst the council has an ongoing in-dwelling inspection regime for gas safety and tenancy checks for tenanted dwellings. We manage 54,000 properties 'pepper potted' with some 14,500 homeowners/mainly leaseholders) who are responsible for the repair, maintenance and improvement to the inside of their dwellings. Our homeowners are no longer social housing tenants and we have no right to enter their dwellings to carry out works of improvement. Therefore a 'whole block' solution based on installing sprinklers for example is neither feasible to install or indeed manage in perpetuity.

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Secondly, the coroner recommended that the council consider the question of retrofitting sprinkler systems. The council is carrying out a detailed feasibility study into the practicalities, and costs, of retrofitting sprinklers into the council's housing stock. As the largest social landlord in London, this would be a significant initial investment for the council, alongside the ongoing costs of a regular inspection and maintenance regime. There are also conflicting opinions in the sector about the efficacy of sprinklers alongside the current fire risk protection measures we are already taking to protect the safety of our residents. However, should the council conclude that sprinklers are an additional measure which should be installed, the issue with regard to leaseholders again presents a problem.

We would venture that the effectiveness of the implementation of both of these recommendations would be undermined because the law as it currently stands does not allow the landlord to enforce the improvement of properties that have been sold. This will inevitably leave parts of blocks unprotected, and in Southwark, this can equate in some cases to up to 50% of the block.

We would be grateful for your urgent consideration of this issue and whether the government can provide guidance to enable landlords to gain easy access to all of the properties it manages to ensure the health and safety of all of their residents. This is of course a pressing concern for Southwark council as we want to comply fully with the coroner's recommendations but it will resonate with all social housing landlords as they consider their own responsibilities in light of the findings of both the Lakanal and Southampton inquests.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD**  
Deputy Leader of the Council  
and Cabinet Member for Housing