



## Department for Communities and Local Government

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22<sup>nd</sup> June 2017

Dear Colleague,

I am writing, following the Prime Minister's statement this morning, to update you on the Grenfell Tower disaster and the action we are taking in response.

This tragedy was one of the worst we have experienced as a nation in many years. So far 79 people have been confirmed dead or listed as missing presumed dead. Unfortunately, with work still ongoing to recover the bodies, we must be prepared for the number to increase.

Of course, all our thoughts are now with the friends, families and loved ones of the deceased, as well as with those who survived this heart-breaking event. We will do all we can to find them the answers they deserve and to provide them with the help and support they need at this tragic time.

### **Immediate support for victims**

Let me first set out in detail the steps that we are have been taking to support the victims and to rehouse those who have lost their homes – work that is being led by the Grenfell Tower Recovery Taskforce, chaired by the Prime Minister.

To co-ordinate the local response a central command centre was set up by government on Friday morning, with John Barradell, the chief executive of the City of London and former lead for London local government on resilience, and Eleanor Kelly, chief executive of the London borough of Southwark, in charge.

There are now around 600 people working on the site and in the immediate area providing support to the victims. The Westway sports centre is being used as an emergency community hub, with 40 officials from six government departments working there. They are making sure that people have essential documents such as driving licences and passports, which they need to get on with their lives.

Alongside them are experts from organisations including Transport for London, Citizens Advice and the Red Cross, NHS mental health staff, nurses, care managers, and a GP. Many of those working in and around the Westway are marked out by wearing hi-vis jackets so that they are easily recognisable. Anyone affected by the fire can walk in and access the support they need, and so far there have been almost 700 visits to the centre.

To reinforce this on-the-ground work we have also established a cross-Whitehall Victim Support Unit. This is staffed with 20 officials from across government and based in my department. This unit gives a single point of contact for victims who need to deal with multiple government services in the wake of the disaster. This is helping to resolve a full range of issues facing victims – from benefits and immigration, to health and education – all in one place.

Support is also available outside the centre and anyone in need can contact the Red Cross' 24 hour hotline on 0800 458 9472. They can also find the latest information about what support and services are available to them at <http://www.gov.uk/grenfell-tower>, or they can get in touch by emailing [support@grenfellresponse.org](mailto:support@grenfellresponse.org).

We will all appreciate that those who are suffering most at this time are the people who have lost loved ones. To offer what support we can in this most difficult of times a Family Bereavement Centre has been set up, to give a place where people can be counselled and offered all the help we can give.

We set up a £5 million fund to cover the immediate needs of those who have been affected. To make sure that gets out quickly to those who need it each family whose home was destroyed is receiving a £5,000 down payment to enable them to buy food, clothes and other essentials. We want to ensure everyone entitled gets this so outreach workers are in place to achieve this. All additional adults over 16 in these households will also be paid £500 in cash.

This is not the only financial support that is being made available. Additional cash payments are being paid out by the council on a discretionary basis, for example to those whose home has been severely impacted but not permanently destroyed. So far almost £1 million has been paid out to local households and residents.

It is absolutely essential that people understand they can keep the money they receive. They won't be asked to pay a penny back, nor will they lose any legal rights as a result of accepting this financial help, nor any benefit entitlement.

It is also crucial that people are aware that this tragic incident will not be used as a reason to carry out immigration checks on those involved or on those providing

vital information to identify victims or those assisting with the criminal investigation. All victims, irrespective of their immigration status, will be able to access the services they need, including healthcare and accommodation and we urge them to do so.

To cover short-term housing needs emergency hotel accommodation has been offered to everyone who has lost their home and we have made a firm commitment that within three weeks all will have been offered rehousing. These homes will be in the local area.

Of course where survivors want to move to another area we will support that – but no one will be forced to move to a place they do not want to go. If any colleague is made aware of a case where this is not happening then they should get in touch with my or the Prime Minister's office and we will make sure this is put right.

The work to find suitable properties for rehousing is now well underway, with 164 already identified and being checked to ensure they are ready to be moved into. In the longer term we guarantee that everyone whose home was destroyed will be guaranteed a new one on the same terms as the one they lost.

Emergency hotel accommodation is also available for anyone who has had their property damaged and does not want to stay there, with almost 300 hotel rooms having already been provided. Practical support has also been put in place to help accelerate necessary repairs and they have already made use of expertise from the Army to assist with this.

Of course as well as concerns about their immediate needs families who have been caught up in this tragedy rightly demand the facts around what caused this disaster, whether it could have been prevented, and how we can ensure it does not happen again. That's why we very quickly set up an independent, judge-led, public inquiry. This will get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible, and provide justice for the victims and their families who suffered so terribly.

The survivors and victims' families will be at the heart of this. All of those who have been affected will be consulted about the terms of reference, and we will pay for their legal representation. Survivors have said they want support to come together as a group to have their voices heard, and so we will ensure they have the help they need to do so.

As the Prime Minister said in her statement these are people who for too long have been overlooked and ignored. We will ensure they are involved in the process at every step.

## **Providing immediate reassurance for those living in tower blocks**

I know that many others living in tall residential buildings will have concerns about their safety after what happened at Grenfell Tower, and will have been in touch with colleagues expressing their concerns, so let me now move on to what action we are taking to ensure the safety of other tower blocks.

We have already instructed all social landlords to perform additional fire safety checks on tower blocks, and to ensure that they have the necessary safety and response measures in place, working in co-operation with local fire and rescue services. Private landlords are also able to use our checking facilities free of charge, and we have taken steps to make them aware of this offer.

One of the issues that has received a lot of attention in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire has been the material used in the cladding of the building. While it remains too early to say what caused this tragedy - and we must all be careful to avoid speculating about it - as a precaution we have now begun to test cladding in all relevant tower blocks.

We believe there are around 600 high rise buildings with cladding. These are being inspected by landlords (typically Local Authorities or Housing Associations) and where a form of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) is used, samples are being taken for testing. The tests, which are being conducted by the Building Research Establishment (BRE), can be done within hours allowing us to test more than 100 samples a day, with capacity expandable if needed. We would urge any landlord who owns a building of this kind to send samples for testing as a matter of urgency.

As the Prime Minister said in her statement results have started coming in and a number of samples have been shown to be combustible. So far we have had samples from 11 high rise buildings in 8 local authority areas where the cladding has failed the test. All landlords and fire and rescue services for those local authorities have been alerted to the results and we are in touch with all these areas to support and monitor follow-up action.

The landlords for all the affected buildings will take action to inform tenants and implement the interim measures set out in guidance sent by the department this morning. We will make known any local authority or housing association whose sample has failed the test once they have informed local residents – to do so before, would be inappropriate. The only areas we can name at this point are Camden, Manchester and Plymouth.

I also want to reassure colleagues that you will be made aware if any sites are in your constituency by the local authority in the first instance – my department stands ready to assist colleagues if further information is required.

To ensure that local authorities and housing associations know how to respond where tests do show action is needed my department has today written to every one of them to ensure they know what immediate steps they should take if the testing shows cladding material is unlikely to be compliant with current Building Regulations, and I attach a copy of this for your information.

We should be clear that landlords have a legal obligation to provide safe buildings. Where they cannot do that, we expect alternative accommodation to be provided. My department stands ready to work with local authorities to ensure they can meet their obligations to provide safety for their tenants. We cannot and will not ask people to live in unsafe homes.

Finally, I would like to say, as a minister I have always been prepared to make tough decisions. I understood the pressures that come with public life but this disaster has shaken my comprehension of what it means to be in office. I have met some of the victims of Grenfell, I have witnessed for myself the grief and anger of those who have lost so much – more than just their possessions but also their loved ones, their security and their memories.

This government will do everything possible not just to replace houses and provide immediate relief, but to seek justice for those people who have been failed. This tragedy should weigh on the consciousness of every person tasked with making a decision so this can never happen again.

**THE RT HON SAJID JAVID MP**