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Grenfell Tower and Building Safety

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18 December 2017

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🕒 4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the ongoing response to June's tragic fire at Grenfell Tower and our wider review of building safety.

It is now six months since the disaster. Last week a number of events were held to mark this sad milestone, including the national memorial service at St Paul's. I had the privilege of attending the extremely moving service alongside the Prime Minister, the Minister for Grenfell victims, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), and, of course, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), among others. The scale and impact of the disaster are unprecedented in recent times, and I could not hope to cover all aspects of the response in one statement, so today I will concentrate on areas where I have new information to share. However, I am very happy to take questions on any aspect of the tragedy and the response to it.

I will start with an issue that is particularly important to hon. Members and to me, and that is finding new places to live for those who lost their homes. Responsibility for rehousing lies with the local authority, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. However, I have been closely involved with the process to ensure that everyone is rehoused as quickly as possible, and my Department has been providing the council with support to help to bring that about. The council has been tasked with finding places to live for 207 households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk. To date, 144 households —almost 70%—have accepted an offer of temporary or permanent accommodation. According to the latest figures from the council, 102 of these households have now moved in.

For those who remain in other accommodation, the council has offered the opportunity to move into private rented accommodation while a permanent home is found. Some have taken up this offer, and others have made it clear that they do not want to have to move twice—something I completely understand. The council was undoubtedly slow off the mark in starting the rehousing process, but, with its own change of leadership, the help of the independent Recovery Taskforce, and pressure and support from the Department for Communities and Local Government, consistent progress is now being made, but I am far from complacent.

I have always been very clear that we should move at the pace of the families involved and that nobody should be rushed or pushed into making a decision about where to live. But to have so many families, including some children, still living in hotels and other emergency accommodation six months after the tragedy is simply not good enough. The situation is undoubtedly complicated, but I have been very clear with the council that I expect it to do whatever is necessary to help people into suitable homes as swiftly as possible. I am confident that the council is capable of that, but, along with the taskforce, I will continue to monitor the situation and to work with the council to ensure that it happens.

The issue of rehousing has an added poignancy with Christmas just around the corner. Whatever one's faith, this a time for family and friends and that makes it a difficult time for anyone who has suffered a loss or trauma. Nothing anyone can do will make this a normal Christmas for the bereaved and the survivors, but we are doing all we can to offer extra support over the coming weeks. A range of activities and events are being staged for local children, particularly those still living in hotels. Social spaces have been booked in four of the hotels where families are staying, so there is room for people to spend time together. NHS outreach workers are visiting residents in the local area to offer specialist mental health support, building on the excellent work the NHS has already done on mental wellbeing. Specialists have screened almost 1,000 adults for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder: 426 are currently in treatment for PTSD, while a further 62 have completed their treatment, and 110 children have also received or are receiving specialist help. The dedicated NHS Grenfell helpline remains available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Local organisations are also providing health and wellbeing support on the ground, including culturally sensitive support that reflects the diverse make-up of the borough, and last month's Budget made available a further £28 million to pay for mental health and emotional support, a community space for those affected and investment in the Lancaster West estate over the next three years. Of course, it is not only the Government providing funds: in the aftermath of the tragedy the British people responded with incredible generosity, donating more than £26 million to various charities.

The majority of that money—more than three quarters of it—has already been paid to survivors and to the next of kin of those who died. Of the remaining £6 million, about £2 million is being held back for people who are entitled to payments but have not yet claimed them, and for some whose applications are still being processed. Payments for those who have not claimed will be looked after by the charities until the individuals are ready to engage. The remaining £4 million will go towards providing long-term support and community projects. As people are rehoused and take the time to grieve, the distributing charities will work with them, identifying their changing

needs and ensuring that money goes where it can best meet the needs of the community. The House can rest assured that every penny that was donated will be spent on the people for whom it was intended; the generosity of the British public demands no less.

Another issue in respect of which the views and wishes of the local community must be paramount is the future of Grenfell Tower itself. The tower is currently being wrapped in white sheeting, a process that will be completed early next year. That is not being done, as some have claimed, to make people forget about what happened. It is being done because many members of the community—people who have been directly affected by the fire—have said that covering the tower will help them to begin the healing process.

I acknowledge the current anxieties about the long-term future of the site among those who have been most affected. I can categorically state that no decisions have been made about the long-term future of the site on which the tower sits. Those decisions will not be led by me, by the Government, by the House, or by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; it is the bereaved, the survivors and the wider community who will lead, and be at the heart of, the decision-making process. My hon. Friend the Minister for Grenfell victims is working directly with them to agree on a set of written principles that will guide the way forward for the future of the site. When decisions are made, we want them to have the broadest possible support from those who have been affected, particularly those who lost loved ones, rather than just following the views of those with the loudest voices. The principles that we are drawing up will help us to ensure that that happens, and they will include a firm commitment from the council that if the bereaved, the survivors and the wider community do not want the site to be redeveloped for housing, the site will not be redeveloped for housing.

As well as dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy, we are determined to do everything possible to prevent such a disaster from happening again. A crucial element of that is the public inquiry, which recently held its first procedural hearings under the chairmanship of Sir Martin Moore-Bick. I know that some members of the

community are concerned about the inquiry's remit, structure and personnel. Some have called for Sir Martin to be supported by an extended panel that reflects the diverse population of the tower. The decision on that rests with the Prime Minister. She has given a commitment to consider the composition of the panel once Sir Martin has determined what further expertise is needed, and she is now giving active consideration to the issue.

Meanwhile, Sir Martin has said that he is actively considering plans for a consultative panel of local people who could talk to and receive information from the inquiry. Such a panel has been established successfully by the inquiry into child sexual abuse as a way of closely involving victims and survivors in the work of that inquiry. Sir Martin has said that any decision on the establishment of such a panel for the Grenfell Tower inquiry will be taken in consultation with tower residents and bereaved families. I can assure the House that, whatever happens next, legal representatives of core participants will have access to all relevant documents. They will be able to offer opening and closing statements at certain hearings, and they will be able to suggest lines of questioning for witnesses. The needs of the community have been at the heart of the inquiry since it was first announced, and that will not change.

Learning lessons for the future will be a crucial part of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's inquiry, but it is not the only piece of work on how building safety can be improved. Earlier this year, the Home Secretary and I asked Dame Judith Hackitt to carry out an independent review of building regulations and fire safety. The current system is complex and confusing, a situation that has developed over many years and under successive Governments. Today Dame Judith has published her interim findings, which show that there is a need for significant reform. I can confirm that the Government have accepted all her recommendations. We agree with her call for a change in culture and a more effective system that will encourage people to do the right thing and hold to account those who try to cut corners. Everyone who is part of the system, including Government, has an important role to play in delivering this change in culture and mind set. We fully support this direction of travel signalled in Dame Judith's report. Achieving culture change will, inevitably, take time, but while Dame Judith explores

these issues further, she has also identified a number of areas where we can make a start today. These include work on restructuring guidance and tightening restrictions on the use of desktop studies.

On desktop studies, we will revise the approved documents on fire safety and commission work to produce a new British standard on when and how such assessments can be used. On guidance, we will work quickly with industry experts to complete work on clarifying the approved documents on fire safety. More widely, we will consider how the entire suite of guidance on compliance with building regulations can be restructured and reordered to make it more user-friendly; we will work with experts across the sector to explore how this can be done.

Dame Judith recommends that consultation with fire and rescue services be carried out early in the design process and then acted on, and that fire safety information on a building should be handed over at the right moment. We will write to building control bodies to highlight these recommendations. The Government will play our part in making the system work better and fixing the problems, and I urge the construction industry, building control bodies, fire and rescue services, landlords and others to play their part too.

In January, Dame Judith will host a summit on building regulation and fire safety. It will form the springboard for the next phase of her review, and I encourage leaders from across the sector to take part and help design a better system. While Dame Judith continues her vital work, we are continuing to support wider work to make existing buildings safer. In the past six months, we have overseen a comprehensive set of fire safety tests on cladding components and systems. Fire and rescue services have visited and checked fire safety in every residential tower that has been identified as having cladding likely to constitute a fire hazard or which they consider a priority for other reasons.

Across the country, swift action has been taken to improve fire safety systems, and to put in place interim measures where risks have been identified. We have provided detailed advice to local authorities, housing associations and private landlords on how

to ensure their buildings are safe. DCLG's expert panel has issued advice to building owners about carrying out the necessary work to address the fire risks of certain cladding systems.

There is undoubtedly room for improvement in the way the building regulations system works and is managed in the future. However, Dame Judith makes it clear that her report should not be interpreted as meaning that buildings constructed under the existing system are unsafe. The system needs to be made stronger for the future, but the action taken since June is helping building owners make homes safer today.

Six months ago 71 people lost their lives and hundreds more lost friends, loved ones, homes and possessions. Six months on, progress is being made; the situation is moving in the right direction, but there is still a long, long way to go. And as long as that is the case, I will not stop working with, and fighting for, people who have suffered more than any of us could bear. They must not be forgotten; they will not be forgotten.

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🕒 5.13 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)

I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his extensive statement.

Last Tuesday, Mr Speaker, you welcomed Grenfell survivors and bereaved families to this House for a memorial meeting. Many of us in the Chamber today were at that event, and, six months on from the terrible fire at Grenfell, they told us, "It should not need us, as survivors, to bear our wounds to get the action needed, but you're the only people we can turn to."

As the Secretary of State said, both he and I were also at the national memorial service in St Paul's cathedral last week, and perhaps the most moving part of the service was a sound montage of voices from Grenfell. The final voice was a woman's: "I want to start afresh," she said,

"I just want a home again."

Yet more than six months after the fire, more than 150 of the 210 families from Grenfell Tower are still in emergency or temporary accommodation. That is no place for a family at Christmas, and no place for people to start to rebuild shattered lives.

It really is not good enough for the Secretary of State to say that responsibility for rehousing lies with the local authority. This is the same council that failed Grenfell residents before the fire, and it is failing them again now. The buck must stop with Ministers. Will the Secretary of State confirm the figures released on Thursday, which showed that only 45 of the Grenfell Tower families are in permanent homes again, and that more than half are still in emergency accommodation? How many of the 50-plus households in temporary accommodation have children, and how many of those have been there longer than the six-week legal limit? Above all, what will he and the Government now do to get the Grenfell Tower survivors and families back in permanent homes again?

In truth, Ministers have been off the pace at every stage since the fire. They have been too slow to act and too reluctant to take responsibility for the response required for this national disaster. The Secretary of State now needs to bring real urgency to this task. Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report today is welcome, but this review was promised in the autumn. It has arrived just before Christmas, and there is still no date for the final report. Many of its findings are not new, but it is still damning to hear the chair say in the report that

“the whole system of regulation...is not fit for purpose, leaving room for those who want to take shortcuts to do so.”

Developers are still building new homes to meet these regulations, and people still do not know whether the materials and systems used on their homes are safe.

The Secretary of State says that he will work quickly with industry experts on clarifying the approved documents on fire safety. This was promised by his predecessor, Eric Pickles, in 2013 after two previous coroners reports on fatal fires, and was due to be published in 2016-17. That never happened. Will the Secretary of State tell us when this work will be completed and published? Will he also act on other recommendations,

rather than waiting for the final Hackitt report next year? Will he start immediate work to make sanctions much tougher for those who do not follow the regulations? Will he make meeting a national standard mandatory for those doing fire inspections? Will he make all fire testing public? And will he ensure that residents are informed of all safety assessments and surveys done on their homes?

On the public inquiry, I am delighted that the Secretary of State has today finally recognise the concern about extending the advisory panel to help to build trust. We welcome this, as we have been making this case for some time on behalf of the Grenfell residents, but the right hon. Gentleman speaks on behalf of the Government, and it is simply not good enough to say that this decision rests with the Prime Minister. She commissioned the inquiry and confirmed its terms of reference four months ago. When is she going to make this decision?

On the safety of tower blocks around the rest of the country, six months after the Grenfell Tower fire, the Secretary of State still cannot give a commitment that all the other tower blocks are now fire safe. Indeed, he cannot even confirm today that all tower blocks have had a fresh fire safety assessment. Is it the case, as some reports state, that fewer than half the council tower blocks in England have had a fresh fire risk assessment since the Grenfell Tower fire? What is the figure for privately owned blocks, which is likely to be much lower? By what date will all tower blocks, public and private, have had a proper fire risk assessment? How much have the Government so far spent on funding to help social landlords to do immediate essential fire safety remedial work? Why will the Secretary of State not back our calls, alongside those of fire service chiefs, for the Government to help to fund retrofitting sprinkler systems in social housing, so that residents can be as safe in those blocks as they are in newly built tower blocks?

This is not about party politics, but it is about challenging the decisions and policies of those in power. This is exactly what the Grenfell families want, and exactly what our job in this House is. All of us share a responsibility to ensure that the Grenfell survivors who need help and a new home get them, that anyone culpable is held fully to

account, and that every measure is in place to ensure that this can never happen again, but I say to the Secretary of State that this demands a much greater sense of urgency than we have had from him and the Government to date.

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Sajid Javid

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his response. He raises a number of issues, which I will go through in turn. He asked about the progress of rehousing the victims of the tragedy. I remind the House that 151 homes were lost to the fire, but there are now 207 households to rehouse as several families took the opportunity to create some small family units, each one of which has been accepted. Of the 207, 144 have accepted offers of temporary or permanent accommodation. He asked me about how many of those households had actually moved in, and 61 have accepted temporary accommodation and 83 have accepted permanent accommodation, with 56 of those receiving temporary offers and 46 of those receiving permanent offers having moved in.

I have recognised on several occasions, and I recognise again today, that progress has been painfully slow, but I have been absolutely clear that no family should be forced or pushed to accept an offer of housing. In addition to offers of permanent and temporary housing, all families have been offered private rented sector accommodation. They can either find it themselves, or they can show examples of what is available out there and work can be done for them. However, the clear instruction to the council has been not to force anyone to do anything that is against their wishes and to treat them like people, not statistics. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with that approach.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the building safety work, and I thank him for welcoming the independent work that has been done by Dame Judith Hackitt. He talked as though that is the only work that has been done since the terrible tragedy but, as he will know, the expert panel was set up within days of the tragedy. The panel

is still in place today, and its remit has been strengthened to look at structural safety, for example. The panel has also issued guidance to local authorities, housing associations and private residential providers on several occasions, and that guidance is being continually updated. Alongside that, we have had the building safety programme, which began its work on the different types of cladding immediately. During the summer, as the right hon. Gentleman will remember, a number of independent building systems tests were carried out, and comprehensive results have been published and advice has been given accordingly. Lastly, a tremendous amount of work has been done by fire and rescue services across the country, and today offers me the opportunity to commend them on their work to test and independently inspect over 1,000 towers. That work continues.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked me whether any residential towers still require testing and inspection. We believe that all residential tower blocks that have any type of aluminium composite material cladding have been properly inspected, as have several other towers about which there are concerns for other reasons.

As for the timing of the report, given the amount of work required and given that the independent review has been looking at a system that has been developed over many years under successive Governments, it is welcome to have the interim report at this stage. We expect the final report in the spring.

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Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)

I welcome the Secretary of State's remarks. Indeed, he has been assiduous in reporting back to Parliament. Dame Judith Hackitt, who has just spoken to the Communities and Local Government Committee, says in her report that there is a culture, to which the Secretary of State referred, of businesses

“waiting to be told what to do by regulators rather than taking responsibility for building to correct standards.”

That has to change. Will the Secretary of State ensure that any future regulations change that culture and ensure that those who design, build and subsequently manage buildings are firmly held to account?

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Sajid Javid

My hon. Friend speaks from great experience. Dame Judith recommends a culture change, which will of course take time, but there are some immediate measures we can take. It is certainly our intention to work with Dame Judith and to implement her final recommendations.

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Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)

I start by thanking the Secretary of State for his statement and Dame Judith for her work. We must not forget that this interim report comes only six months after one of the most devastating high-rise fires the world has seen, and our thoughts at this time of year are with those who lost everything in the catastrophe.

I wish to repeat the call that my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) made last month for the Government to allow indefinite leave to remain to those to whom they offered an immigration amnesty. That is needed for undocumented survivors to feel able and safe to take up the support they so desperately need. Surely that is simply the right thing to do in these tragic circumstances.

This report makes recommendations to ensure that we have regulatory systems that are robust enough for now and for the future. We must be able to assure residents that the buildings they live in are, and will remain, safe. We in the Scottish National party welcome the report's conclusion that safety must come ahead of cost cutting. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the findings of this report are heard and that safety is made paramount?

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Sajid Javid

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, particularly on the immigration rule changes that the Government have announced to help families. We continue to monitor that to see what more we can do, if required. I also assure him that building safety is absolutely paramount, which is why we commissioned all the work that has taken place since the terrible date of this tragedy and accepted the recommendations of the interim report today.

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Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con)

What is the present fire advice to residents in similar blocks? If a fire breaks out, should they stay in their accommodation or should they leave the building?

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Sajid Javid

The fire advice situation can be different in every block. What we have asked is for the owners of such blocks, often the local authority or a housing association, to work with fire safety experts, including the fire and rescue service, and to make sure that, whatever the fire advice is, it is made very clear to every single resident. We believe that advice has been universally followed.

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Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab)

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, despite the Prime Minister's promise after the Grenfell Tower fire that,

"I have fixed a deadline of three weeks for everybody affected to be found a home nearby",

there are, according to our calculations—including from the tower, Grenfell Walk, other walkways and nearby buildings—more than 200 children still in bed-and-breakfast accommodation after up to six months? I believe that is illegal.

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Sajid Javid

The commitment we gave that all families would be offered temporary accommodation within three weeks of the date of the tragedy was absolutely met. They were all offered such accommodation. I have continually updated the House over the last six months, and no doubt the hon. Lady has had updates from her constituents. We have tried at every stage to offer both permanent accommodation and different types of temporary accommodation. As I have acknowledged today, there are still too many families in emergency accommodation, and we continue to work with the local authority to do whatever we can to reduce that number.

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Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)

Will the Secretary of State confirm that he still regularly meets the victim groups and is really listening to what they have to say? To pick up on a point he made, is he ensuring that, despite the understandable questioning from the Opposition, people will not be pressed in any way to take unsuitable accommodation for political expediency?

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Sajid Javid

I can absolutely confirm that to my hon. Friend. I have regularly met victim groups and members of the community, and so has my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), the Minister with responsibility for Grenfell victims. He meets members of the community on an almost weekly basis. I can also confirm that we will not press anyone to take any type of accommodation with which they are not comfortable.

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Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)

The Select Committee found it very helpful to hear from Dame Judith at first hand this afternoon. One of her clear recommendations was that instead of fire and rescue services giving advice and that then being ignored by those in authority, such advice ought to put on a basis where it has to be taken account of and implemented. Does the Secretary of State agree with that proposal? If he does, will he rethink his decision not to provide any extra funding to local authorities to carry out important fire safety work that fire and rescue services say is essential?

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Sajid Javid

First, let me thank the hon. Gentleman for the work his Committee is doing to help the overall review of building regulations. I welcome the fact that Dame Judith Hackitt gave evidence to the Committee today and its members could question her.

The hon. Gentleman asks me specifically whether we agree with the recommendation that advice from fire and rescue services should not be ignored—we do agree with that. We have accepted Dame Judith's interim recommendations. He also asks about funding for fire safety measures, and I can say that our commitment stands that if local authorities cannot afford essential fire safety measures, they should come to talk to us and we will work with them to give them the flexibility they need.

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Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)

I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. We all agree that it is crucial that the Government listen to the victims of this tragedy. Will he confirm that he and other Ministers will remain in regular contact with victims' groups throughout the process and for as long as is necessary?

Share

Sajid Javid

I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. It is essential that in dealing with this tragedy, be it on issues relating to fire safety, rehousing, mental health support or the future of the site, which I mentioned earlier, all decisions must be made in consultation with the local community—not just those with the loudest voices, as I said, but actual members of the community who have been the most affected.

[Share](#)**Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)**

Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chair of the Select Committee, it is estimated that cash-strapped local councils have already committed £500 million to essential fire safety works in the aftermath of Grenfell. Will the Secretary of State tell us how much of that has been reimbursed by central Government?

[Share](#)**Sajid Javid**

As I have said a number of times at the Dispatch Box, we have asked local authorities to contact us, and more than 30 have done so. Ten have given us detailed information and three have given us the actual information we require. We are in active discussions.

[Share](#)**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)**

I am glad to hear that progress is being made on rehousing victims, but will the Secretary of State update the House on what steps are being taken—by the Government or by the council—to ensure that sufficient decent homes are available for people to be rehoused in?

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Sajid Javid

The council has been leading the work to acquire new homes. About two months ago, it set a plan to acquire about 300 homes by Christmas, and it has exceeded its plans—the number is closer to 400 homes.

[Share](#)**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)**

We cannot wait for the final Hackitt report before resolving the issue of the combustibility of cladding and insulation. Some blocks are passing the current test with limited combustibility materials. Some are failing, but the landlords are using other types of limited combustibility materials as a replacement. Will the Government just say that only non-combustible materials should be used for external cladding on high and medium blocks?

[Share](#)**Sajid Javid**

The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, because clearly a number of building owners have, when they are taking down cladding, sensibly asked what they are going to replace it with. That is why we asked the expert panel to look at that, in the light of the building safety programme, and it has issued detailed guidance on it.

[Share](#)**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con)**

The Secretary of State has previously said that the local authority had accepted the recommendations of the independent taskforce. Will he update the House about progress on implementing those recommendations?

[Share](#)**Sajid Javid**

I meet the local council regularly and I also have discussions with the taskforce. A number of points were set out in the taskforce report, and the local authority has set up a group to go through each in detail. As we get further details, I will bring them to the House.

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Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)

Right across the country, people now live in tower blocks from which cladding has been removed. They will not only worry about their safety, but face much higher heating costs, because the cladding also served as insulation. The Secretary of State has already partly answered my question, but nevertheless when will he tell landlords what cladding is safe for use so that safe reinstallation can take place as soon as possible? He will appreciate that there is some urgency to the matter.

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Sajid Javid

First, it is not for me, as a Minister, to recommend what type of cladding should or should not be used. That work should be done by experts, which is why the expert panel that we established, which is still in place, has issued guidance ever since the date of the tragedy. It continues to update guidance on what cladding should be used at all times.

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Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)

Everybody is united in never wanting to see something like this happen again. An insulation manufacturer in my constituency, Kingspan, which was not involved in this tragedy, is keen to work to ensure that building regulations deliver the fire-proofing that we all hope for and expect. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet Kingspan?

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Sajid Javid

I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that I should not comment on which companies were or were not involved in the tragedy; that will be a decision for the public inquiry and the criminal inquiry. Although in principle I am happy, at the right time, to meet any company that is involved in building services, it is appropriate that I do so only once I am comfortable that any inquiries and reviews are over.

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Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)

Dame Judith Hackitt draws attention to how the privatisation of things such as fire inspections has denuded local authorities of essential expertise, and that is also true of building control. Can we bring such deregulation to an end, urgently, because people continue to be put at risk? Can we bring such matters back under the responsibility of local authorities, where they belong?

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Sajid Javid

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has in mind the 2002 deregulation of building regulations self-certification schemes, or perhaps the 2005 regulatory order on fire safety that the then Government claimed was cutting red tape. As I have said, successive Governments have been involved in building regulation, and I am glad that Dame Judith Hackitt is looking at all of that.

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Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)

Some things are best left open to interpretation and some things are simply best proscribed. Does my right hon. Friend consider a simple prohibition of combustible materials on the outside of all high-rise buildings to be the right way forward?

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Sajid Javid

As a member of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend is rightly taking a close look at these issues—I welcome that. In the interim report, Dame Judith talked about a risk-based approach. The appropriate response for the Government is to wait for the final report, look at all these issues in the round, and then make a final decision.

[Share](#)**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op)**

Will the Secretary of State look again at the role of local authorities in building control? In particular, will he get Dame Judith to examine the idea of primary agency, which has effectively removed the “local” from local authority?

[Share](#)**Sajid Javid**

Yes.

[Share](#)**Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab)**

The Secretary of State can in fact direct local authorities to take the advice of the fire services until such time as the committee of inquiry reports. There is nothing stopping him from doing that. In the past, I have dealt with the Government from a local authority angle. How much money is the Secretary of State actually making available, bearing in mind that it was said today the cost will be billions?

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The hon. Gentleman will know that local authorities have rightly been taking account of the advice that has been issued by the expert panel, which is constantly updated as the panel gets new information. On the availability of money or financial flexibility, we

are, as I said earlier, working with a number of local authorities.

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Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)

I welcome the interim review. Dame Judith's explanation to the media and the Select Committee today was very impressive. Will the Secretary of State tell us how many applications for the costs of cladding replacement and fire precautions, including fire marshals, have been registered with the first-tier tribunal by landlords and freeholders?

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Sajid Javid

First, may I take the opportunity to thank the hon. Gentleman for the work that he does on the all-party group on fire safety and rescue? I also thank him for welcoming the report. He raises the issues of tribunals and leaseholders in relation to meeting the costs of building safety. I have made it clear that I expect private sector landlords to take the lead that has been shown by housing associations and local authorities. I have also increased the funding that is available from the Leasehold Advisory Service so that people can get proper advice.

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Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)

Local housing providers in my area tell me that there are now bottlenecks and delays both in accessing new cladding material and finding contractors to carry out the work. Can the Secretary of State say how quickly he thinks all properties can have new cladding if they need it, given that there are concerns about extra costs in relation to heating bills due to a lack of insulation if cladding has been removed, or for additional fire safety measures in the interim if it has not?

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Sajid Javid

I reassure the hon. Lady that, right from the start of this terrible tragedy, when it was clear that a lot of cladding would have to be replaced, we worked very closely with the industry and the supply chain. That work has been led by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. I would be happy to write to her to provide further information.

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Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)

Since 2013 and the coroners' reports into the Lakanhal House and Shirley Towers' fires, it has been well established that our building regulations need to be overhauled. May I push the Secretary of State to elaborate on the details on page 13 of his statement and give a date by which the necessary changes to the building regulations will be made?

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Sajid Javid

Part of me would love to give a specific date today, but the hon. Gentleman will understand that it would not be practical or sensible to do so. We must wait for the final report. In the meantime, there are interim measures that can be taken, including simplifying the guidance in Approved Document B, which we can start working on immediately. We will be able to give a date on the final overall changes to building regulations and building guidance only once we have the final report.

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Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)

This morning I met representatives of the Wythenshawe Community Housing Group, who estimate the cost of modifications to their blocks in my constituency at £6 million. If the Treasury allowed the works under the VAT shelter incentive, there would be a

saving of £1.2 million. Are the Government considering that?

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Sajid Javid

If I have heard the hon. Gentleman correctly, I believe that he is referring to a housing association. As I understand it, no housing association has approached the housing association regulator. If the housing association to which he refers wishes to do so, I am sure that it will be taken seriously.

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Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)

It was very good to hear the Secretary of State say in his statement that he was encouraging people to do the right thing and to hold to account those who try to cut corners. In order to do that, people need information. Does he agree with the call of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) that all fire test information needs to be made public from now on?

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Sajid Javid

It is certainly worth looking at.

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Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)

rose—

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Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)

rose—

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Mr Speaker

Wow! What a difficult choice. I call Jack Dromey.

Share

Jack Dromey

Six months on, despite the West Midlands Fire Service recommending the fitting of sprinklers, 10,000 households in 213 tower blocks in Birmingham are awaiting such action. The council has said that it will play its part, but as it is suffering the biggest cuts in local government history, it has looked to the Government to play their part. Nothing has been forthcoming. This cannot go on, so will the Secretary of State agree to meet Birmingham's MPs and the tenants of tower blocks in Birmingham?

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Sajid Javid

It is worth noting what Dame Judith said about sprinklers in her report. In summary, she recognises that a number of measures can be taken to improve the fire safety of buildings, but there is not any single one that is absolutely essential—advice must be taken about each particular building. With regard to Birmingham, as I have said about other councils, if it wishes to approach us about financial flexibilities, we will be happy to consider that.

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Chris Elmore

I have raised the issue of combustible insulation with the Secretary of State before. I understand his Department's focus on cladding, but may I plead with him again? When these buildings are de-cladded, their insulation is exposed and this can cause problems with flammability. What is he doing to investigate this?

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Sajid Javid

The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point. The expert panel has looked at the issue and covered it in its guidance. It continues to monitor the situation and, if necessary, it will update that guidance.

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Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab)

Was Dame Judith right this morning to say that the Government were told in 2010 that the regulations were “not fit for purpose”? If so, this is a catastrophic failure of not only regulations but politics. If we are to lift the anxiety of the tens of thousands of people living in the 165 blocks of flats that are still at risk, should not the Government’s action be not just inspection, but remedial action on a generous and swift basis?

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Sajid Javid

I agree with the last bit of the hon. Gentleman’s remarks—any action we take should be as swift as possible.

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