



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP

*Secretary of State for Housing,
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Thank you for your letter of 17 October about the impact on residents of high-rise buildings of replacing unsafe aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding.

I want to assure you that the Government is determined that residents should be safe and feel safe in their homes and is acting urgently and comprehensively to make sure this is the case.

To ensure the immediate safety of residents, we have worked with local authorities, housing associations, fire and rescue services (FRS) and building owners to ensure that suitable interim safety measures are in place. Local FRS have agreed interim measures, such as fire wardens and improved fire detection systems, at all high-rise buildings identified as having unsafe ACM cladding. This means that residents can continue to live in these buildings until the unsafe cladding is replaced.

However, I agree it is vital that all high-rise buildings are made permanently safe by replacing unsafe cladding systems. These are major works which need to be undertaken properly and effectively.

In the social sector, remedial work has started or completed at 115 of the 159 buildings with unsafe ACM cladding. There is a firm plan in place for a further 40 buildings. Last month we started to release money to local authorities and housing associations from the social sector cladding remediation fund. We have agreed funding applications for 136 buildings with costs totalling £248m. We are still accepting new applications, if required. This funding will pay for the replacement of unsafe ACM cladding systems, including insulation.

It is for the building owner or responsible person to undertake fire risk assessments and to determine what other specific fire safety measures are needed in their buildings. I expect them to take this responsibility seriously and have made clear that my department will continue to offer local authorities financial flexibilities for other essential fire safety work identified in their risk assessments.

In the private sector, I have written to building owners to reiterate my strong expectation that they must remediate their buildings swiftly and protect leaseholders from bearing the cost. I have also said that we will back local authorities to step in and carry out this essential remedial work where the owners refuse to do so. This is having an impact. There are now significantly more high-rise buildings where owners have put a remediation plan in place or started to remediate the unsafe cladding. A growing list of developers and landlords have agreed to fund the cost of remediation. This includes Barratt Developments, Taylor Wimpey, Mace Group, L&G and Peabody and covers at least 47 private residential buildings. In addition, warranty claims have been accepted for 12 buildings and further claims are being assessed.

Nonetheless, I recognise that this is a difficult and stressful situation for leaseholders, and one they find themselves in through no fault of their own. Last December the Government announced additional funding for the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) to provide independent, free advice to leaseholders on building safety issues. My ministers and officials continue to engage with responsible parties on this issue. I have made it clear that I rule out no options to ensure that costs are not passed onto leaseholders.

You mention the specific case of Cypress Place (Green Quarter) in Manchester. I would like to assure you that the Minister of State for Housing and senior officials are engaging very closely with Lendlease, the local authority and other parties to ensure leaseholders are not left out of pocket.

You also raise concerns about the impact of remedial work on the residents of the affected buildings. The Government expects landlords to protect residents, where possible, from any disruption caused by the removal and replacement of unsafe cladding and to communicate with them regularly during this process. That includes programming and sequencing their work, in consultation with residents, to ensure that people are not unduly exposed to cold. Local authorities, such as Camden, have made a commitment to ensure that residents are not adversely affected during the removal of cladding.

When the external wall of a building is renovated or replaced, the work must comply with the energy efficiency requirements of the Building Regulations 2010. Residents who have concerns about heating costs may wish to contact the Government-funded Energy Saving Advice Service (ESAS) for independent information about energy efficiency. ESAS will be able to advise on available local schemes as well as those that operate nationwide.

You also refer to the importance of ensuring that new homes are safe and that residents voices are listened to. The Government agrees with the diagnosis made by Dame Judith Hackitt in her Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety and supports the principles behind her recommendations for a more effective system. This system must ensure that all higher-risk buildings are constructed and maintained to a high standard, applying not just to fire safety but other aspects of building performance. I will set out my plan to implement the recommendations of the Hackitt Review in the autumn.

The Government is committed to delivering lasting change with residents having a much stronger voice in an improved system of fire safety. The Social Housing Green Paper, published on 14 August, included options to address these concerns. We will build on existing good practice in the social sector and develop a new training offer to support residents in engaging with their landlords on building safety issues. We will also establish a pilot with a small group of social landlords to test options for communicating and engaging with residents on safety issues.

In your letter, you ask for assurances of permanent rehousing for Grenfell survivors. The Government is clear that our highest priority is to ensure the bereaved, survivors, and wider community receive the support they need. This includes financial, practical and mental health support, as well as making sure the survivors are provided with a permanent home on the same terms as before. Kensington and Chelsea Council's Grenfell Rehousing policy ensures that former residents of Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk are provided with a choice of high quality homes that meet their needs and, where possible, takes into account their wishes.

You raised three additional concerns when you handed over your open letter on 17 October.

First, you discussed the situation of Help To Buy Customers in properties with ACM cladding. I am determined that remediation is completed effectively and swiftly so that any impact on Help To Buy customers and other residents with mortgages is minimised. Where Help To Buy customers have purchased homes affected by ACM cladding they may contact the regulator and Homes England if they wish to discuss redeeming their equity loans.

Secondly, you indicated you would like to see legislation to prevent those with disabilities or young children being allocated flats above a certain height. Local councils are responsible for drawing up and operating their own allocation schemes within the framework of legislation through which they allocate homes to residents. They will take each household's needs into account in allocating homes. The Social Housing Green Paper sets out our intention to undertake an evidence collection exercise to help us better understand how the allocations framework is playing out in local areas and whether it is striking the right balance of fairness, support and aspiration.

Finally, you suggested that the Chalcots Estate in Camden should be categorised as a Category 1 hazard' under the Housing Act 2004. My Department is closely engaged with Camden Council, which is committed to making the buildings on the Estate safe for residents. The Council has advised us that it has an ongoing programme of fire safety works at the Estate and is in the final stages of consulting residents about the procurement and replacement of the cladding and the windows.

I'd like to thank you again for your letter. The Government is determined to learn the lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire and ensure that residents of tall buildings are safe, and feel safe in them.

Yours faithfully,

RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP