

First legal action launched to keep residents safe

- First step in legal action taken against freeholder failing to fix building safety defects
- Owners of Vista Tower told to start remedial works or be forced to by the courts
- Act marks next step in using new powers to ensure action on building safety

The Department for Levelling up has taken the first step in legal action against Grey GR, an organisation ultimately owned by RailPen, protecting residents and ensuring proper building safety.

Grey GR Limited Partnership, the freeholder of Vista Tower, a fifteen-storey tower block in Stevenage, has been given 21 days to commit to remediating the tower's fire safety defects or an application will be made to the courts.

This action follows two years of delays for more than 100 residents living in the tower and reaffirms the government's commitment to making sure building owners, landlords and developers meet their legal obligations and protect tenants in their own homes.

The freeholder is one of the first to face action by the newly created Recovery Strategy Unit, set up to identify and pursue firms who repeatedly refuse to fix buildings, working closely with other enforcement authorities.

Levelling Up Secretary of State, Simon Clarke said:

"The lives of over 100 people living in Vista Tower have been put on hold for over two years whilst they wait for Grey GR to remediate unsafe cladding. Enough is enough.

"This legal action should act as a warning to the rest of industry's outliers – big and small. Step up, follow your peers and make safe the buildings you own or legal action will be taken against you."

Sophie Bichener, leaseholder in Vista Tower said:

"We thank the Government for helping us, and leaseholders across the country – Vista Tower residents simply want to live in safe and secure homes.

"This action is a step in the right direction for the innocent leaseholders still desperately pleading with their building owners to take responsibility.

"Now the leaseholder protections are in force – it should serve as a warning to those entities still playing games and doing all they can to dodge their legal obligations."

Leaseholders of Vista Tower have been handed bills and unable to sell,

despite unsafe cladding being identified on the building over two years ago.

Whilst the building registered with the Building Safety Fund in 2020, the funding agreement is yet to be signed, meaning the government cannot release any money.

There are at least 23 other buildings registered with the Building Safety Fund that have been unable to progress due to unnecessary delays. The department is examining these cases closely and considering next steps.

The Secretary of State will also consider issuing an application for a Remediation Contribution Order against other entities associated with Grey GR including Railways Pension Trustee Company Limited (RailPen) and Railtrust Holdings Limited (Railtrust), requiring them to financially contribute to the remediation costs.

Leaseholders are now able to apply for a remedial order and are encouraged to do so if the owner of their building is failing in their responsibilities.

More guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-sure-remediation-work-is-done#how-does-this-affect-me-the-leaseholder>