

Labour criticises Theresa May for failing survivors and tower block residents in the six months since the Grenfell Tower fire

In the week of the six month anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, John Healey MP has written to the Prime Minister setting out five areas where the Government is still failing Grenfell survivors and tower block residents across the country:

re-housing, testing of other blocks, funding, overhauling building regulations, and the nature of the public inquiry.

In the letter, **John Healey MP** says "over the last six months the Government has failed to make good many of the promises made to Grenfell survivors and to the country."

He adds "most Grenfell survivors are still stuck in hotels or temporary housing, most tower block residents across the country still don't know if their homes are safe, no Government funding has been offered for vital safety work including retrofitting sprinklers, and no start has been made to the overhaul of building regulations which we have known since 2013 are badly flawed."

"This was a national disaster on a scale not seen before in this country. We need national Government leadership and action."

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, said:

"Six months on from the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Government is failing to learn its lessons and, more importantly, failing the survivors.

"It is a disgrace that the majority of Grenfell residents have still not been given homes and that tower blocks across our country have still not been made safe. We need answers from the Government and we need action.

"Grenfell was an entirely avoidable human disaster. The Government must act now to prevent it from being repeated."

Full text of the letter:

Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

10 December 2017

Dear Prime Minister

Six months on from the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower, we remain firm in our determination to ensure Grenfell residents have the hope and new homes they need, those responsible are held fully to account, and all necessary steps are taken so that a disaster like this can never happen again.

While there has been some progress, such as the setting up of a public inquiry and a review of building standards, these have fallen far short of what is needed, and action in other areas is severely lacking.

Over the last six months the Government has failed to make good many of the promises made to Grenfell survivors and to the country.

Most Grenfell survivors are still stuck in hotels or temporary housing, most tower block residents across the country still don't know if their homes are safe, no Government funding has been offered for vital safety work including retrofitting sprinklers, and no start has been made to the overhaul of building regulations which we have known since 2013 are badly flawed.

There continue to be concerns about lack of public trust in the inquiry, as most recently expressed in a petition led by survivors and bereaved families. And survivors continue to lack clarity on how much help with legal costs is available to them and how they can access it.

This was a national disaster on a scale not seen before in this country. We need national Government leadership and action. I would be grateful for your urgent response on the points below.

Rehousing Grenfell Tower residents

On the 17 June 2017 you said "I have fixed a deadline of three weeks for everybody affected to be found a home nearby".

However, on the latest figures, only 39 families have permanent homes, with the more than 150 remaining families still in hotels or other emergency or temporary accommodation.

1. Why, six months on, have more families not been rehoused?
2. Why has the Government failed to provide any funding to build new homes, or to acquire existing empty homes to help survivors?
3. How many families will still be in hotels or emergency accommodation over Christmas?

Fire safety checks on tower blocks

On 22 June 2017 you said of the Government's testing programme for tower blocks "we can test over 100 buildings a day".

However, of the more than 4,000 tower blocks across the country, only 274 have been tested by the Government.

4. Why, six months on, have you not tested more of the country's 4,000 tower blocks given the failure in national building regulations likely affects more than just those buildings with aluminium cladding?

5. How many social housing tower blocks have had remedial work done to make them safe, and how many have not?

6. How many private housing tower blocks have had remedial work done to make them safe, and how many have not?

7. Can you confirm whether or not every tower block in the country has had an inspection by either a local authority or the fire service since the Grenfell Tower fire, to ensure proper fire safety arrangements are in place?

Funding

On 17 June 2017, you said: "My Government will do whatever it takes to... keep our people safe."

However, the nature of the work that has been recommended by fire service chiefs and now needs doing urgently on many high-rise buildings is by its nature expensive. Therefore it is essential that Government is prepared to fund this work up-front as necessary. However, your Government has so far point blank refused all funding for landlords who cannot afford this work.

8. Will you now do what Labour has been asking and set aside £1bn for retrofitting sprinklers into high-rise social housing tower blocks across the country so that residents in older tower blocks are as safe as those in new buildings?

9. In areas where councils are able to do more themselves but are constrained by the cap that you currently place on their housing revenue accounts – will you now lift this cap to allow councils to invest to keep their residents safe?

Building and fire regulations

On 26 June 2017, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said: "Building regulations and the system for ensuring fire safety in buildings have been developed over many decades. Until the Grenfell Tower fire, many experts would have claimed that that system had served us well."

However, since the 2013 Coroners' reports after the Lakanal House and Shirley Towers fires, it has been well established that our current building regulations need to be overhauled. The tragedy at Grenfell Tower means that we must take a fundamental look at building and fire regulations.

10. Will you immediately start Government work on overhauling the building regulations as was recommended in two Coroners' rule 43 letters to the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2013, incorporating any recommendations from the Hackitt Review as needed?

The Inquiry

On 29 June 2017, you said "I am determined that there will be justice for all the victims of this terrible tragedy and for their families who have suffered so terribly."

11. Will you respond to the request by Grenfell survivors and bereaved families and immediately use your powers under the 2005 Inquiries Act to appoint a more diverse advisory panel to support the Judge Moore-Bick?

It is clear that doing so will strengthen survivor's confidence in the inquiry and increase their willingness to participate – both considerations that are absolutely vital to the inquiry's success.

Survivors and bereaved families have been told that their legal costs would be fully covered, but many remain unclear what they are entitled to and how to access it.

12. How much funding has been earmarked specifically for legal representation for the Grenfell survivors and bereaved families, and what action is the government taking to ensure all those affected are fully aware of their right to representation?

I would be grateful for your prompt reply on these points.

John Healey MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Housing