

Statement to Parliament: Government response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the Government's response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and our safety inspections of cladding in other buildings.

Introduction

I know I speak for the whole House when I express my heartfelt grief at the Grenfell Tower catastrophe.

Almost a fortnight has passed but the shock has not subsided.

I have visited Kensington and witnessed the terrible anguish of those who have lost so much.

In some cases people will have lost literally everything.

I am sure that, like me, many members have returned from their constituencies this morning with the anger and the fears of residents still ringing in their ears.

Anger that a tragedy on this scale was ever allowed to happen in 21st century Britain, and fear that it could happen again.

It is this fear I want to address first today Mr Speaker.

Cladding checking process

I know the entire country is anxious to hear what we are doing to reassure residents about fire safety in similar blocks around the country.

My department has contacted all councils and housing associations asking them to identify all tall residential buildings in England that they're responsible for, which have potentially similar cladding.

We estimate this number to be around 600.

On [18 June we wrote to them and asked them to start sending samples](#), and on 21 June our combustibility testing programme for Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding started, run by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

On [22 June the government provided advice to all these landlords about interim safety measures](#) where a building has ACM cladding that is unlikely to be compliant with Building Regulations.

This advice was recommended by an independent panel of experts and includes advice based on the emerging findings from the Metropolitan Police investigation into Grenfell Tower.

I can inform the House that as of midday today, the cladding from 75 high-rise buildings, in 26 local authority areas, has failed the combustibility test.

I know members will rightly want to know if their local residents are affected, and my department will publish regular updates on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The combustibility test has 3 categories rated 1 to 3, and it is judged that cladding material in category 2 or 3 does not meet the requirements for limited combustibility in Building Regulations.

I can also confirm to the House that so far, on that basis, all samples of cladding tested have failed.

The fact that all samples so far have failed underlines the value of the testing programme and the vital importance of submitting samples urgently.

The testing facility can analyse 100 samples a day and runs around the clock.

I am concerned about the speed at which samples are being submitted. I would urge all landlords to submit their samples immediately.

In every case of failed tests landlords and local fire and rescue services are alerted, and we are supporting and monitoring all follow-up action, including by a dedicated caseworker in my department.

Landlords for all affected buildings have informed or are informing tenants and implementing the interim safety measures needed, working with fire and rescue services.

At this time the safety of people living in these buildings is our paramount concern.

I am determined residents have as much peace of mind as possible in such worrying times.

Landlords must keep residential buildings safe for their tenants.

Where they cannot satisfy that obligation with appropriate mitigating measures, we expect alternative accommodation to be provided while the remedial work is carried out.

That is exactly what has happened in Camden and I'd like to pay tribute to the residents for their brave response in such a distressing situation.

Other residential buildings and public buildings

Mr Speaker, it is obvious the problem of unsafe cladding may not be a problem unique to social housing, or residential buildings.

We have asked other owners, landlords and managers of private sector residential blocks to consider their own buildings and we have made the testing facility freely available to them.

My department is also working with the [Government Property Unit](#) to oversee checks on wider public sector buildings.

Hospitals are well prepared – each one has a tailored fire safety plan.

But nothing is more important than the safety of patients and staff, so on a precautionary basis we have asked all hospitals to conduct additional checks.

The government will continue to work closely with fire and rescue colleagues to prioritise and conduct checks based on local circumstances.

The [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) are contacting all bodies responsible for safety in schools instructing them to carry out immediate checks to identify any buildings which require further investigation. We will have more information this week.

Across the wider government estate 15 buildings have been identified as requiring further investigation.

Victims and survivors

Now while that work continues it is vital we offer every assistance to the victims of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

As of this morning, 79 people have been confirmed dead or listed as missing presumed dead. Sadly, it is believed that this number will increase.

Mr Speaker, as the Prime Minister told the House last week, the initial response of the emergency services was exemplary, but the immediate support on the ground was simply not good enough.

A remarkable community effort sprung up overnight, while official support was found wanting.

That failure was inexcusable, and it is right that a new team and approach is now in operation.

We have activated the Bellwin Scheme and sent significant central government resource including:

- a single point of access into government provided by the Grenfell Tower Victims Unit, operating from my department
- staff from 6 government departments offering support at the Westway Assistance Centre
- and a family bereavement centre in Holborn

The government has set aside a [£5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund](#) and more than £1 million has been distributed.

Each household affected is receiving £5,500 to provide immediate assistance, and so far 111 households have received payments.

The British Red Cross are operating an advice line for anyone affected or in need of support.

They are just one of many charities, faith organisations, and businesses that have provided invaluable assistance to victims.

Mr Speaker, I can announce to the House today that the government will contribute £1 million to support their efforts.

This money will be new money; it will be distributed by the local consortium of charities, trusts and foundations who are working together to respond to this tragic event.

Update on re-housing

Our other priority has been to find survivors a safe and secure place to live.

The Prime Minister made a clear commitment that a good quality temporary home would be offered for every family whose home was destroyed in the fire, within 3 weeks.

Every one of those families will also be offered a permanent social home in the local area.

This work is underway, and the first families moved into their homes over the weekend.

Last week I also [announced](#) that the government had secured 68 homes in a new development in Kensington to rehouse local residents.

We will do everything we can to support the victims of the Grenfell fire now and in the future, and I will regularly update the House on our progress.

Building Regulations / Expert Panel/ Public Inquiry

Mr Speaker, as the Prime Minister said in her statement to the House last week, the disaster at Grenfell Tower should never have happened.

There is an ongoing police investigation, and there will be an independent judge-led, public inquiry, to get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible.

Building Regulations and the system for ensuring fire safety in buildings have been developed over many decades.

Until the Grenfell Fire many experts would have claimed that system has served us well.

But now we have witnessed a catastrophic failure, on a scale many thought

impossible in 21st century Britain.

It is clear that this failure must be understood; it must be rectified without delay, and the government is determined to ensure that happens.

As an initial step I can inform the House today that I am establishing an independent expert advisory panel who will advise the government on any steps that should immediately be taken on fire safety.

Further details of the panel including its members will be released shortly.

Mr Speaker, this tragedy must never be forgotten, and it should weigh heavily on the consciousness of every person tasked with making the decisions that ensure it can never, ever happen again.