

Statement to Parliament: Grenfell one year on

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the government's response to the Grenfell Tower fire, meeting our commitment to update the House following the Opposition Day debate on the 16th of May.

I am also writing to the Chair of the Select Committee to provide a formal report on progress, a copy of which will be placed in the House library.

As we mark a year since that tragedy, this will be an extremely painful time for the community.

Many honourable members provided powerful and poignant contributions in the e-petition and Opposition Day debates last month.

And I know that the whole House will join me in sending the bereaved and survivors our love and prayers.

Mr Speaker, the 14th of June 2017 saw the greatest loss of life in a residential fire since the Second World War.

71 people lost their lives on the night of the fire and a former tower resident who was rescued from the 19th floor passed away earlier this year.

The start of the public inquiry was a timely reminder of that terrible human cost.

A baby who never lived to learn how much he was loved.

Three generations of a family wiped out.

Heroes who died saving others.

Nobody could fail to be moved by the extraordinary tributes paid by family and friends to the loved ones they lost.

By their courage and dignity in the face of unimaginable loss.

And, yes, by their anger too.

A catastrophe of this kind should never have happened in the UK in 2017.

And when it did, the initial response was not good enough.

Nothing can undo the anguish and devastation this has caused.

But, as the Prime Minister has said, we can and must do right by the memory of those who lost their lives – and those left behind.

To support those affected.

To secure justice.

And, above all, to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again.

There has been an unprecedented effort across government and our public services.

Help is being provided by a range of issues from advice on benefits to emotional and mental health support.

In total, we have spent over £46 million of national government funds – and committed a further £34 million to help meet rehousing costs, deliver new mental health services and deliver improvements to the Lancaster West Estate.

The appointment of my Right Honourable Friend for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner as Grenfell Victims' Minister has helped ensure that the voices of those affected inform the response.

And we [set up the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce](#) to help and challenge the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) to provide better support for residents and rebuild trust.

And I want to thank everyone for their tireless support – particularly the emergency services and the public and voluntary sectors.

Clearly, one of the most pressing issues has been rehousing those who lost their homes.

A large scale programme of investment work has been under way to ensure they are of good quality and personalised to meet the needs of families.

The council has acquired over 300 homes in and around the borough.

203 households needed new homes. 198 have accepted permanent or temporary accommodation, which means that all but 5 households have accepted offers. 134 have now moved in.

Most of the work to ensure all homes that have been accepted are ready to move into is complete and we expect many of the remaining properties to be ready in the coming weeks.

While they are preparing to move, the council has ensured that all households have had the option to move into more suitable accommodation.

But I remain very concerned about the 43 households who are living in hotels.

My ministerial team has met with many of them and I've personally written to all of them, to find out what barriers exist in each individual case and how we can overcome them.

Mr Speaker, this is not where any of us wanted to be a year on from the fire.

While there has been progress in recent weeks, overall the pace has been too slow.

My department and the Independent Taskforce are continuing to provide scrutiny and challenge to the council and we have provided additional resources directly to the council to help them speed up this work.

We will not rest until everyone is settled into new homes.

But Mr Speaker, those affected also badly need answers and to see justice done.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry and Metropolitan Police investigations will ensure this happens.

But we must also learn from what has happened.

Over the past year my department has been working closely with fire and rescue services, local authorities and landlords to make sure other buildings like Grenfell Tower are safe.

Remediation work has started on two-thirds of buildings in the social housing sector.

And the [Prime Minister announced last month](#) that the government will fully fund the removal and replacement of potentially dangerous ACM cladding on buildings over 18 metres owned by social landlords, with costs estimated at £400 million.

And we've made it clear that we expect building owners in the private sector to not pass costs on to leaseholders.

To that end, I recently met leaseholders and put their concerns to representatives from industry at a number of roundtables.

Some in the sector, such as Barratt Developments, Legal & General and Taylor Wimpey, are doing the right thing and taking responsibility.

I urge all others to follow.

The private sector must step up and I am not ruling anything out if they do not.

In addition, [I recently welcomed Dame Judith Hackitt's final, comprehensive report](#) following her [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#).

In response, I committed to bringing forward legislation to reform the system of fire safety and give residents a stronger voice.

Having listened carefully to concerns, the government intends to ban the use of combustibile materials on the external walls of high-rise residential buildings, subject to consultation.

We will publish the consultation next week.

It is essential that people living in buildings like Grenfell Tower are not

only safe but they feel the state understands their lives and works for them.

There is no question that their faith in this has been shaken.

Which is why – as well as strengthening building and fire safety – we'll be publishing a social housing green paper by recess.

I am confident that these measures will help us rebuild public trust and deliver the meaningful, lasting change that's needed.

Mr Speaker, our country has seen many difficult times, but that night at Grenfell Tower was one of our darkest hours.

We will never forget those who died.

We will not falter in our support for those who are still grieving.

Nor flag in our determination to ensure that no community has to go through such agonies again.

In doing so, I think we can be inspired by the incredible spirit of the people of North Kensington and the way they have come together.

And when we say 'never again' we mean it.

I commend this statement to the House.