

Statement to Parliament: Grenfell rehousing

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the ongoing work to rehouse the victims of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower.

Three weeks have now passed since the fire.

As we all know it soon became clear that the delivery of the initial response on the ground was simply not good enough.

Since then much has been done to support victims.

To see that justice is done. And to ensure that other buildings around the country are safe.

But throughout, our first priority has been helping victims who have suffered such an unspeakable trauma.

We have been working hard to ensure that they have all the support they need.

Securing emergency accommodation.

And making financial and emotional support available as quickly as possible.

The response efforts have been coordinated by the Grenfell Response Team, led by John Barradell.

He is being supported by colleagues drawn from London councils, the wider local government sector, the voluntary sector, police, health and fire services as well as central government.

And I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to them all for their immense efforts over the last few weeks.

The new leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Elizabeth Campbell, has given a fulsome apology for the inadequate initial response.

She has also asked for help from central government to put things right.

As the Communities Secretary has set out in a [written ministerial statement](#) today we will be establishing an independent Taskforce to help the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea build their capability.

So they can deal with the longer term challenge of recovery.

Rehousing victims

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that we would make an offer of new temporary housing to all those who have lost their homes as a result of the

fire, within 3 weeks.

These are good-quality, fully-furnished homes so that families can move on from emergency accommodation and live – rent-free – in a proper home whilst permanent accommodation, on equal terms, is found.

158 families from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk have been identified in need of such housing.

I can confirm that every family that is ready to talk to the housing team has been offered a temporary home.

139 have received offers of accommodation.

19 families have not yet been ready to engage in this process.

We need to respect that.

Some are still in hospital as a result of their injuries.

In some cases the people on the ground offering these families support have been clear that it would be inappropriate at this time to ask them to make a decision about where they will live. These families, Mr Speaker, have been through unimaginable trauma.

And we need to go at the pace that they want to go.

What matters above all else is what the families individually want.

The Grenfell Response Team has been working with the 139 families currently engaged with the process to match them with appropriate temporary accommodation. And to start to talk to them about their long-term needs.

The housing team have identified and secured over 200 good quality properties so that residents can have a choice where to live.

I know some have raised concerns about the quality of the accommodation offered.

All properties have been inspected by the housing team to ensure they are in a good condition.

Now, my Rt Hon Friend the Communities Secretary personally has seen an example of the kind of property on offer.

Representatives of local residents groups have also seen and been assured of the quality.

And if the Shadow Minister would find it helpful I would be very happy to visit some of these properties with him so he can assure himself of their quality.

All of the properties are local.

Either in Kensington and Chelsea or a neighbouring borough.

This will mean that families can continue to be near their friends and relatives, go to the same GP, and send their children to the same school.

14 offers of temporary accommodation have been accepted, and 3 families have already moved in.

And I expect this number to increase but we have to respect the pace at which families want to move.

I have personally met, Mr Speaker, over 30 of the families who have been directly affected. And from talking to them I understand there are many reasons why some are reluctant to take up these offers.

Some might choose to remain in hotels until they have an offer of a permanent tenancy.

We also understand one of the big issues holding people back is the lack of trust.

Some families were told that they were moving into Grenfell Tower on a temporary basis and then years later they were still there.

Their concerns are entirely understandable – that is trust which we need to work hard to earn.

We also have to respect their decision if they do not wish to move out of temporary accommodation, before permanent housing is available.

We will keep on making offers to families of local homes we think would be suitable for them.

But no-one will be forced into a home that they do not want to move to. And I want to respond to a number of reports which have been made, claiming people are being told to move far from London.

Or that they may be deemed homeless if they do not accept an offer. I want to be absolutely clear: if this is ever suggested to a victim then this is completely unacceptable.

I have already stated that if anyone is aware of an individual family which is not receiving the offer we have promised, please tell me, and we will fix this.

And I repeat that call to the House now. So let me set out again what the government has committed to do:

Every household that is ready to talk, has been offered temporary accommodation.

The housing team will continue to work with families to ensure that their individual needs are met.

As my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister said, everyone whose home was destroyed by the fire will be guaranteed a new home on the same terms as the one they lost.

And this means:

- paying the same rent
- with the same level of security
- and in the same area

When it comes to permanent housing we have already announced a new block of social housing that will provide 68 new homes in Kensington Row.

We are urgently working with a number of developers to secure similar properties. Either in Kensington and Chelsea or very close to North Kensington, so families can stay in the same area.

Mr Speaker, these negotiations have not yet concluded and we need to work closely with the residents to make sure that the sort of properties we are able to make available will match what they want.

There were 17 leaseholders who lost their homes and we are working with them to make sure that they do not lose out financially because of the fire.

I met recently with a group of leaseholders, and we are working with them individually to find the right solution for them.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, on my visits to the Westway, hearing the harrowing accounts of survivors has been the most humbling and moving experience of my life.

The families I have met have been through unimaginable pain. We will continue to do all we can to get them the help they need.

This tragedy should never have happened.

And we are determined to do all that we can to make sure something like this never happens again.