

Statement to Parliament: Update on Grenfell Tower fire and fire safety

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.

Almost 3 weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower.

Progress has been made to help the survivors and people in surrounding buildings who were affected.

Landlords across the country have been taking measures to make their buildings safe.

[Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed](#) to lead a full, public inquiry.

And an [independent expert panel](#) is now advising my department on any immediate action on fire safety that is required.

Mr Speaker, the disaster at Grenfell Tower should never have happened.

The police investigation and public inquiry will find out why it did.

Right now, the immediate priority of the government is to provide every assistance to those who were affected and take every precaution to avoid another tragedy in buildings with similar cladding.

Victims and survivors

The Grenfell Tower Victims Unit is operating from my department and providing a point of access into government.

And staff from across government continue to offer support at the Westway Assistance Centre and a separate family bereavement centre.

Almost £2.5 million has been distributed from our £5 million [Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund](#).

Each household affected is receiving £5,500 to provide immediate assistance, and so far payments to 112 households have been made.

Mr Speaker, there has been much speculation about who was in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and it is vital that we find out.

As I [announced yesterday](#), the Director of Public Prosecutions has made it clear that there will be no prosecution of tenants at Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk who may have been illegally subletting their property.

So all tenants can be confident about coming forward with information for the

authorities.

There may have been people living in flats that were illegally sublet, who had no idea about the true status of their tenancy.

Their families want to know if they perished in the fire.

These are their sons, their daughters, their brothers and sisters.

They need closure, and it is the least they deserve.

But that can't happen unless we have the information we need, so we are urging anyone with that information to come forward, and do as quickly as they can.

Next steps in Kensington and Chelsea

Mr Speaker, the immediate response to the Grenfell disaster is being 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.

Their expertise and hard work is making a huge difference, but this is only a temporary measure.

It is also vital that we put in place long-term support for the longer term recovery.

It was right that the Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea took the decision to move on.

I look forward to working with a new Leader of the council, and I will look at every option to ensure everyone affected by this tragedy has the long-term support they need.

Update on re-housing

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that every family who lost their home because of the fire would be offered a good quality temporary home within 3 weeks – and the deadline is this Wednesday.

I have been monitoring the progress of re-housing, and we will honour that commitment.

Every home offered will be appropriate and of good quality.

What we will not do is compel anyone to accept an offer of temporary accommodation they do not want.

Some families indicated they wanted to remain as close as possible to their former home but when they received their offer, and took a look at the

property, decided it would be easier to deal with their bereavement if they moved further away.

Some families decided that, for the same reasons, they would prefer to remain in hotels for the time being.

Other households indicated that they would prefer to wait until permanent accommodation becomes available.

Every household will receive an offer of temporary accommodation by this Wednesday, but every household will also be given the space to make this transition at their own pace, and in a way that helps them to recover from this tragedy.

Public inquiry

Mr Speaker, the people affected by the disaster at Grenfell Tower need our assistance, and they are receiving it.

But they also want answers.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed to lead a full, independent inquiry.

He has visited Kensington, he has met victims and survivors, as well as members of the local community who have done so much to help.

After consulting with the community, Sir Martin will then advise on the terms of the inquiry, and we will ensure there is legal support for victims so that they can play a full part.

Cladding testing and fire safety in buildings

We must allow that inquiry and the criminal investigation to run their course. Each must have the space to follow the evidence wherever it takes them.

We must all be careful not to prejudge or prejudice either of them.

But what we can do, right now, is take sensible precautions to avoid another tragedy.

The Building Research Establishment is continuing to test the combustibility of cladding from councils and housing associations, as well as private landlords.

So far all the samples of cladding tested have failed. That's 181 out of 181.

It's obviously disturbing that there are such a large number of buildings with combustible cladding, and the priority now is to make those buildings safe.

Where appropriate mitigating measures cannot be implemented quickly landlords must provide alternative accommodation while the remedial work is carried

out, and that is exactly what happened in the 4 tower blocks in Camden.

Our primary concern has been buildings over 18 metres, or 6 storeys, where people stay at night.

Hospitals and schools are also being assessed.

Mr Speaker, we ourselves have asked questions about the testing regime after discovering the 100% failure rate so far.

Last week I asked for the testing regime to be independently assessed.

This was carried out by the Research Institutes of Sweden, and they have confirmed they believe the process to be sound.

A full explanatory briefing note on the testing process is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

As the note explains, every failed test means the panels are unlikely to be compliant with the limited combustibility requirement of the building regulations guidance.

This has been confirmed by legal advice and the advice of the independent expert panel that was established last week.

For use of the panels to be safe landlords need to be confident that the whole wall system has been tested and shown to be safe.

We are not aware of any such system having passed the necessary tests, but I have asked the expert advisory panel to look into this further.

Mr Speaker, almost 3 weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower, but I know I will speak for every member of this House when I say we are still all in shock.

It was not just the terrible scale of the suffering, it was the fact it happened in 21st century Britain, in London's richest borough.

I will continue to direct the full resources of my department to assist the Grenfell Response Team.

I will be working closely with the new Leader of Kensington and Chelsea council to make sure there are plans for the longer term recovery are in place.

And I will return to this House regularly to update Honourable Members on progress.