

Grenfell Update: Written Statement made 19 July 2018 by James Brokenshire, Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCWS890) in the House of Commons

Honourable Members will have been moved by the strength, courage and dignity demonstrated by those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire during the commemoration that took place last month marking one year on. I wanted to update the House before the summer recess on the critical work the Government is undertaking in response to the tragedy and broader building safety work.

First, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government continues to work closely with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to ensure the bereaved and survivors are given the support they need. This includes practical, long-term emotional, and, in some cases, mental health support to ensure all the bereaved and survivors are settled and comfortable in new permanent accommodation.

The latest position is that of 204 households from Grenfell Tower and Walk who need rehousing, 200 households (over 98 per cent) have accepted an offer of either permanent or temporary accommodation. 142 households have now moved in; of which 96 have moved into their permanent homes and 46 households are currently living in good quality interim accommodation. The number of households in hotels has reduced to 40, with 19 in serviced apartments and three living with friends and family. My Department is working closely with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to ensure that the properties acquired for the survivors are safe and ready to move into and I have been assured by the Council that the majority of that work is now complete. 24 properties that have been accepted by residents are still being finalised and the vast majority of these are expected to be completed over the summer. I am also continuing to focus on the support that is available to those moving into their new homes; through working with the Council to provide a strong package of resettlement support. This includes a range of elements, from helping to provide furniture, packing and removals, support to join community groups in a new local area, and drop-in counselling sessions.

Our support and commitment to the bereaved, victims and wider community remains steadfast.

Second, I wanted to update the House on the work we are doing to ensure residents of high-rise buildings are safe and feel safe, now, and in the future. The Government is committed to learning lessons from the Grenfell fire and delivering far-reaching change to ensure similar devastation cannot happen again.

In the days following the tragedy, we set up a Building Safety Programme as part of our response. Key initial actions to guide and support this work included:

establishing an Expert Panel, chaired by Sir Ken Knight, and an industry response group to advise on and support urgent safety and remediation work; and
commissioning an independent, forward-looking review of the building regulations and fire safety system, led by Dame Judith Hackitt.

The report by Dame Judith, *Building a Safer Future*, was published on 17 May. As I said in my statement to the House that day, its publication was a watershed moment for everyone who has a stake in ensuring the people living in buildings like Grenfell Tower are safe, and feel safe. Dame Judith called for major reform and a change of culture. The onus should clearly be on everyone involved to manage risk at every stage, and government should do more to set and enforce high standards. The Government agrees with that assessment and supports the principles behind the report's recommendations for a more effective system.

As Dame Judith acknowledged, delivering fundamental system reform – including changes to the law – will take time and, as I said in May, I will set out our detailed implementation plan in the autumn.

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But we can, and must, start changing the culture and practice right now. We are therefore delivering key elements of the report.

First, I am pleased to announce that my Department is today publishing the clarified building regulations fire safety guidance (Approved Document B) for consultation. The revised guidance will be easier to use and reduce the risk of misinterpretation by those carrying out and inspecting building work. It is a vital first step on the road to reform. A link to the consultation is here <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fire-safety-clarification-of-statutory-guidance-approved-document-b> and I am placing the documents in the library of the House.

I am clear we will not hesitate to go further than the Hackitt recommendations where we deem it necessary. Not only have we launched a consultation on proposals to restrict or ban the use of so-called desk top studies (assessments in lieu of tests) for cladding materials, as recommended by Hackitt, but we have also launched a consultation on proposals to ban the use of combustible materials in the exterior wall construction of high-rise buildings. I have also listened to calls from a number of colleagues, experts and organisations that a wider review of Approved Document B is necessary to ensure the guidance reflects innovations in the construction sector and the latest understanding of fire behaviour and protection. With this in mind, I am today announcing the Government will carry out a wider technical review of the guidance on fire safety. We will publish a call for evidence in the autumn inviting views on the technical issues and further improvements that could be made in the Approved Document.

Reforming the regulatory system requires change across all its aspects. In relation to building safety, I can announce we will introduce a mandatory requirement on landlords in the private rented sector to ensure electrical installations in their property are inspected every five years. This will help drive up standards across the private rented sector and reduce deaths and injuries due to electric shocks and fires caused by electric faults.

We are committed to establishing a more effective regulatory regime for fire and building safety. We have started work with building control bodies, National Fire Chiefs Council, the Health and Safety Executive and others to consider options for a Joint Competent Authority and stronger regime as per the recommendations in the report, and we will set out our implementation plan in the autumn.

The Hackitt Review identified a lack of leadership within the construction and fire safety industries as a contributory failure on building safety. I want the construction industry to drive action on building safety now, leading from the front and changing practice and behaviour. We know there are many who are already doing the right thing, and I want to encourage more in the industry to do the same.

I am pleased we have already had support on this and today I can announce that Wilmott Dixon, Keir, L&Q and Salix have agreed to be the first of the early adopters on building safety. This is a commitment to prioritising building safety. These organisations will work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to trial ways of working in line with the Hackitt recommendations and assess benefits in the buildings they are constructing or managing. We would welcome others in industry coming forward to join them.

We also need to ensure residents are given a voice in the system. This is necessary to provide reassurance and recourse across all tenures by providing: greater transparency of information on building safety; better involvement in decision-making through the support of resident associations and tenant panels and a no-risk route of escalation and redress. This was echoed in feedback from tenant events held to inform the Social Housing Green Paper. We are considering options for addressing these concerns, including through the forthcoming Green Paper.

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I can also announce today I intend to set up a residents' reference panel for the life of the Building Safety Programme. This indicates our commitment to residents, and ensures policy is grounded in the experiences of those who live in high-rise buildings.

The Hackitt Review also called for the construction and fire safety industries to show more effective leadership in raising the competence of those working on high-rise buildings. I have been pleased to see both the construction and fire sectors come together quickly in the response to this challenge set by Dame Judith, under the stewardship of the Construction Industry Council. We remain in close contact with the industry to see the progress of their proposals on competence, and will stand ready to provide support as required.

I also welcome the work of the Home Office and National Fire Chiefs Council on setting up a new independent Fire Standards Board to produce and own professional standards for fire and rescue services in England. This forms part of the Government's fire reform programme which will make services more accountable, effective and professional. Work is underway to form the board by late summer, with work on the first standards beginning shortly thereafter.

To provide additional oversight of the industry's work, I intend to set up an Industry Safety Steering Group. This group will hold industry to account for making cultural change happen, and I can announce today that this will be chaired by Dame Judith Hackitt.

Our focus on delivering the systemic reforms envisaged by the Hackitt Review will not distract from the critical work of ensuring people are safe in their homes. Guided by advice from our Expert Panel, we continue to work closely with fire and rescue services, local authorities and landlords to identify high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding, ensure interim measures are in place to reduce risks, and give building owners clear advice about what they need to do to make buildings safe.

My written statement of 28 June provided an update on our work to identify, test and remediate unsafe cladding systems on high-rise buildings. I announced in that statement the further steps I would be taking to promote swifter action by building owners to remove potentially unsafe cladding on private sector high-rise residential buildings. I expect to chair the first meeting of the new private sector remediation taskforce which will oversee this activity before summer recess. Since 28 June two additional roundtables have been held with industry to work on solutions for individual building owners who cannot resolve building remediation themselves. This work with industry will continue over the summer.

We will also take further steps to ensure there is clarity for building owners about the circumstances in which buildings should be remediated. These steps will include the production of clear guidance about the circumstances in which decorative or small amounts of Aluminium Composite Material cladding should be remediated. My department has also written to all relevant building owners to remind them of their responsibilities and I am pleased to be able to report that the National House Building Council has accepted a warranty claim for the New Capital Quay development. I call on others to follow their lead.

Further to my update on building safety on 16 May, my department is continuing to monitor and facilitate action taken by those who purchased Manse Masterdor fire doors. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is working with the Local Government Association and National Housing Federation to provide advice and support to building owners with these doors.

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In my update of 16 May I also reported that Synseal, the company that took over the Manse Masterdor business, were working with Trading Standards to ensure their products met relevant standards and had withdrawn their composite 30 minute fire door range. Following further testing of their fire doors, Synseal has informed my department they have withdrawn their composite and timber fire door range from the market as it does not consistently meet the minimum standard. Based on advice sought from the Expert Panel, Synseal have written to all customers of Masterdor Limited (a subsidiary of Synseal) asking building owners to review the fire risk assessment of their buildings to determine how quickly these doors should be replaced. The Expert Panel have advised me there is no change to the risk to public safety and the failure of Masterdor Limited fire doors remains a product standards issue which is being overseen by Trading Standards. My department is working closely with Trading Standards on this issue.

Local fire and rescue services continue to provide advice locally and the National Fire Chiefs Council, with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, are monitoring assessments and the action being taken by customers of Manse Masterdor and Masterdor Limited.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will continue its investigation into the wider fire door market, where we are testing doors from at least 20 suppliers over the next six months.

Nothing is more important than ensuring that people are safe and feel safe in their homes. We have made progress but there is much left to do. I shall provide a further update to the House on this work in the autumn.

This statement has also been made in the House of Lords: HLWS862