

MAYOR OF LONDON

The Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

Date: 12 June 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

It is difficult to believe that three years have now passed since the Grenfell Tower fire. Even as we face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that the tragedy at Grenfell is not forgotten. As we pause to remember the 72 lives tragically lost, we must pay tribute to the courage and resilience of the bereaved, survivors and community of north Kensington.

Since Grenfell, I have acted decisively to improve the safety of buildings in London. I now require new buildings on GLA land to meet high fire safety standards and I have introduced innovative fire safety policies into my new London Plan. I have also met regularly with the bereaved, survivors and the wider community. They are understandably frustrated at the lack of meaningful change and are fearful that a similar tragedy could happen again.

I share their concerns. It is clear to me from the lack of progress, and other significant fires for example in Barking and Worcester Park, that the Government has failed to grasp the scale of the building safety crisis. It is also frustrating that social housing residents are still waiting for the major reforms promised two years ago in the green paper.

I would like to take the opportunity of the third anniversary to share areas of concerns and emphasise where further Government action is needed.

Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations

It is encouraging that your Government has accepted all 46 recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Transparency regarding implementation is fundamentally important. I am publishing regular updates on London Fire Brigade's progress and wider work that is under my control. I note that you published an update on the Government's progress earlier this month and I welcome the announcement of public consultation going forward. I strongly urge you to publish more regular updates on the Government's progress.

One of the concerns that I have heard from the Grenfell community is that recommendations from the Inquiry may be ignored or poorly implemented. The independent charity INQUEST is calling for a National Oversight Mechanism: a new, independent, public body with a duty to collate, analyse and monitor recommendations and their implementation arising from all post death investigations, inquiries and inquests. This is a sensible suggestion to prevent future deaths, and one that I hope you will seriously consider.

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Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2

Five months on from the resignation of Benita Mehra, whose link to a cladding manufacturer undermined the community's trust and confidence in the Inquiry, a replacement panel member has yet to be appointed. It is paramount that a suitable replacement, following a transparent process, is appointed as soon as practicable.

The impact of the pandemic on the Inquiry was unavoidable in order to safeguard those involved. It is positive that the Inquiry is aiming to resume in July 2020 with limited attendance hearings, but the bereaved, survivors and residents must remain at the heart of the inquiry and they must be able to follow these proceedings remotely.

RBKC support to the community

In its fifth and last report, the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce has recognised continuing concerns about the pace of change and working culture within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and its relationship with the bereaved, survivors and residents. RBKC clearly has much more to do not only to regain the trust of the community but also to effectively work as a council. I would like your assurances that these matters will be followed up with RBKC to ensure that the eight recommendations made by the Taskforce in the fourth report are implemented, and that there will be independent public confirmation of this.

One matter that has been raised with me is access to the Grenfell Recovery Budget. You will be aware that RBKC last year set aside £50 million from its reserves over five years, starting with £12 million both last and this financial year, "to support people in their recovery". Yet several of the Next of Kin of those who lost their lives in the fire tell me that they have found it impossible to access any funds. I have raised this with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government but am yet to receive a response.

My Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development has recently been approached by the Lancaster West Residents' Association about the recharging of leaseholders for the refurbishment of their estate. I raised this issue with the previous Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government last year. I again urge your Government to work with RBKC to fund these works without recharging leaseholders, given the objective of community healing after the disaster.

Cladding remediation

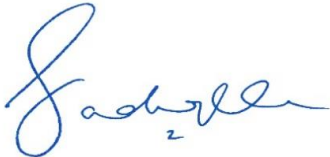
The additional £1 billion announced in March 2020 to remove and replace non-ACM materials on high-rise buildings is a welcome victory for the thousands of leaseholders affected. However, it is clear that the funding will be insufficient for the number of buildings potentially in scope and I am concerned about the additional barriers that social landlords will face in accessing the Fund. My Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development raised our objections to these additional barriers for social landlords directly with Lord Greenhalgh last month.

For those living in buildings with unsafe cladding, the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent delays to remediation work have resulted in increased stress and the need for prolonged interim fire safety measures. I was extremely disappointed to hear from Lord Greenhalgh, in a Select Committee evidence session last month, that the Government has decided, after consideration, not to cover the cost of waking watch. I urge you, once again, to reconsider this position and protect leaseholders from these extortionate costs.

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The bereaved, survivors and community of Grenfell have made public safety their priority. While struggling with their own personal grief and recovery, they continue to campaign for building safety and are demanding change so that people can be safe in their homes. The Government's response has been too slow, and these families deserve better.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small number '2' written below the name.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Cc: Paul Scully MP, Minister for London