

MAYOR OF LONDON

Lord Stephen Greenhalgh
Minister of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government,
2 Marsham Street,
Westminster,
London,
SW1P 4DF

Our ref: 202005TC/BSF

Date: 26 May 2020

(by email)

Dear Lord Greenhalgh,

I welcomed the additional £1 billion Building Safety Fund announced in the Spring Budget earlier this year, but I would like to raise my concerns regarding the exclusion of social landlords from this funding.

Including the Social and Private Sector ACM Cladding Remediation Funds (SSCRF and PSCRF), this will be the third cladding remediation funding programme administered by the Greater London Authority (GLA) on behalf of the Government. My team is working constructively with your officials at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to deliver the new Building Safety Fund in London. The announcement made today is testament to the incredible work of leaseholders and resident groups who have spoken out and campaigned for funding from central Government to remove and replace unsafe non-ACM cladding.

While the new funding is a step in the right direction, aspects of its design are a serious cause for concern. In particular, it is alarming that the fund will exclude Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing from applying unless they are 'financially threatened'. Councils face similar restrictions.

Reducing access for RPs and councils to the new Building Safety Fund will force them to divert money from new supply of homes, including the genuinely affordable homes that London so desperately needs. It is therefore inconsistent with the Government's previous aim in the SSCRf set up in July 2018, the explicit objective of which was to avoid negative impacts on new supply of homes and repairs of existing stock. The different approach taken for this new Fund for non-ACM materials underlines the lack of coherent strategy from the Government on building safety, and will have a number of negative consequences.

First, excluding social landlords from the new funding will hinder their ability to deliver the new genuinely affordable homes needed to solve the crippling housing crisis in London. It may also lead to an increase in rents which would be detrimental and unfair to social tenants.

Furthermore, it will reduce the resources that social landlords have available for repairs and maintenance on existing homes, potentially leading to poorer quality of life for social housing residents. Finally, an absence of government funding will leave social landlords with no choice but to spread costs over a number of years, resulting in extended timescales for remediation.

I am also extremely concerned about the potential equalities impacts for groups with protected characteristics of excluding social landlords from the Building Safety Fund. Homeless households, those on the housing register and existing social tenants are more likely to be older, families with children, ethnic minorities and/or people living with a disability.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this decision and ensure that social landlords have full access to the Building Safety Fund and are at least on an equal footing to those private building owners who will be applying to the Fund. In the meantime, the GLA would welcome the Government publishing an Equalities Impact Assessment for this policy.

As well as the approach to social landlords, I would like to end by raising another serious concern. As with the previous funding for ACM remediation, the Building Safety Fund fails to relieve the financial pressure of interim fire safety measures, most notably waking watch. This is proving ruinous for individual leaseholders. I understand that Government has decided not to fund interim fire safety measures such as waking watch, as per your recent statement to the HCLG Select Committee. I hope you will reconsider, and appreciate that for leaseholders, some of whom are paying £500 a month for waking watches, it is imperative that financial support is forthcoming as quickly as possible. Once again, the Mayor and I encourage you and the Secretary of State to review this position and fund the cost of interim fire safety measures.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Copley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Copley

Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development