



HM Government

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report: Government Response

January 2020



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Contents

Introduction	4
Recommendations for Government	5
Recommendations for London Fire Brigade (LFB)	9
Recommendations for all Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs)	10
Next Steps	12

Introduction

On 30 October 2019, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry published its Phase 1 report which looked at the events on the night of the fire on 14 June 2017 in which 72 people died in the greatest loss of life following a residential fire since the Second World War. No words can ever lessen the unimaginable suffering experienced, and we know that for those that tragically lost their lives, for the survivors and for the families and relatives of those affected, change cannot come fast enough.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick's Phase 1 report was exhaustive in detail and made a series of findings and recommendations relevant to government. As the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made clear at the time of publication, the Government accepted in principle all these recommendations. This includes new duties on building owners and managers to: issue information to Fire and Rescue Services, ensure there are premises information boxes, carry out regular inspections of lifts and fire doors, equip buildings with the facilities for Fire and Rescue Services to send evacuation signals and ensure building floor numbers are clearly marked.

This response sets out the actions taken by the Government, in addressing the recommendations made to us and to the Emergency Services, including the London Fire Brigade.

As Government has stressed before, we did not wait for the Phase 1 report to be published before addressing the most pressing building and fire safety risks, for example the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Home Office accepted the recommendations made by Dame Judith Hackitt in her report and remain committed to introducing legislation in response to the Hackitt Review. Further to this, both MHCLG and the Home Office are actively looking beyond the remit of these recommendations and intend to bring forward a series of measures that go further in ensuring risks that exist across high-rise buildings are tackled robustly and swiftly.

Government will continue to ensure that we actively engage with those who have been personally affected by the tragedy and listen to their views on the changes made to building regulations and fire safety. That is why on 16 January 2020 the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government met with a group of bereaved, survivors and residents to discuss the report and the Government's proposed response.

Recommendations for Government

Use of combustible materials

Sir Martin made it clear in his report that the use of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) rainscreen cladding and combustible insulation on the exterior of Grenfell Tower was the defining factor in the rapid and all-consuming spread of the fire. MHCLG together with the Home Office have already taken, and will continue to take, firm and decisive action to address the presence of dangerous cladding on buildings across the country.

Since the Grenfell Tower fire, MHCLG and the Home Office have identified over 400 high-rise buildings with unsafe ACM cladding, and we have worked with Local Authorities and fire and rescue authorities to ensure that appropriate interim safety measures are in place. In addition, MHCLG has made £600 million funding available for the replacement of unsafe ACM cladding on high-rise residential homes in the social and private sectors.

MHCLG banned the use of combustible materials on new high-rise blocks of flats in December 2018 and on 20 January 2020 went further by announcing the launch of a consultation to review the current ban, including proposals to lower the 18 metre height threshold to at least 11 metres.

MHCLG has also issued clear advice to building owners on a range of fire safety issues, including other (non-ACM) types of cladding, to help them meet their legal obligations to keep buildings and residents safe.

Recommendations where changes are required by law

The Home Office's upcoming Fire Safety Bill will aim to clarify the scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – the 'Fire Safety Order' – to put beyond doubt that building owners or managers of multi-occupied residential buildings of any height are required to consider fully and mitigate the fire safety risks of any external wall systems and front doors to individual flats. This will also affirm Fire and Rescue Services' ability to enforce locally against building owners who have not remediated unsafe ACM cladding.

The Fire Safety Bill will create a firm foundation to enable the Government to lay regulations needed to deliver the legislative recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report. These recommendations include building owners or managers sharing information with fire and rescue services on external wall systems, and undertaking regular inspections of flat entrance doors. The Home Office plan to consult on these proposals in Spring 2020.

Given the forthcoming legislative clarification, it would be advisable for those responsible under the Fire Safety Order for multi-occupied residential buildings to assess the risk of external wall structures if they have not done so, and take the necessary measures as a result of that assessment. If they do not do so, the legislation will affirm that enforcing authorities have the powers they need to take action. MCHLG together with the Home Office will work closely with building owners, managers and Fire and Rescue Services to ensure that effective steps are taken to improve the fire safety of residential buildings.

MHCLG continues to put in place further measures to support enforcement action. Social sector residential buildings with unsafe ACM have now either had that material removed or had such work scheduled, and interim safety measures have been put in place for private and social sector buildings where needed. However, we recognise the concerns of those residents who live in buildings with unsafe ACM cladding. Building owners are responsible for the safety of their buildings, and MHCLG officials will work with Local Authorities to support enforcement options if a clear plan for remediation is not provided by building owners by the end of this month.

Acting on advice from the Independent Expert Advisory Panel, MHCLG has commissioned research to support further understanding of the fire performance of non-ACM external wall systems. A report on which will be published shortly. MHCLG continues to work with stakeholders to gain a fuller understanding of the construction and safety of high-rise residential buildings.

‘Stay Put’ and evacuation

The Chairman recommended that Government should develop national guidelines for carrying out evacuations of high-rise residential buildings. To do this, the Home Office and MHCLG have already formed a steering group together with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) which includes technical specialists, academics, fire sector leads and employee group representatives. The steering group met for the first time on 18 December 2019 and have inputted into the scope and commissioning of research into ‘Stay Put’ and evacuation. The work of the steering group will also contribute to MHCLG’s Technical Review of Approved Document B of the Building Regulations on building design matters relating to ‘Stay Put’ and evacuation.

An initial evidence review has already been conducted and the Home Office will commission a more detailed independent evidence assessment shortly. This will include a literature review and analysis of existing policies, including international examples. It is anticipated that this will be followed by technical ‘operational’ research and the development of national guidance to support all Fire and Rescue Services.

Fire doors

MHCLG is committed to ensuring that all fire doors meet and exceed minimum standards. When issues were identified with the consistency of fire-resistance performance doors, during MHCLG’s investigation into fire doors, MHCLG immediately notified National Trading Standards and worked to stop production and sale of affected door blanks within the United Kingdom with immediate effect.

MHCLG has continued to work with the Association of Composite Door Manufacturers (ACDM), to raise standards across the market. The remediation of Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) composite fire doors is being led by the fire door industry. The members of ACDM have given their commitment to work with building owners to identify those doors in scope of remediation.

Sir Martin recommended that building owners or the responsible persons carry out urgent checks to ensure fire doors complied with current standards. MHCLG has recommended that all fire doors, including their closers, should be routinely checked or inspected by a suitably qualified professional. MHCLG has also issued advice through its independent Expert Panel asking landlords or building owners to communicate with residents to ensure that they are aware of the importance of maintaining the self-closing devices on all fire doors, including flat entrance doors.

It is important to clarify our independent Expert Panel and the NFCC have stated that while the risk to public safety remains low, those buildings affected by this issue should review their fire risk assessment to determine how quickly affected doors should be replaced.

Following the conclusion of the Fire Door testing programme, the Independent Expert Advisory Panel have reviewed the advice made available to building owners and will be publishing updated advice on fire doors as part of the consolidated Expert Panel advice note.

Testing and certification

We also recognise the importance of the testing and certification of materials in ensuring that residents are safe and feel safe in their homes. This will be considered by Sir Martin in more detail during the course of Phase 2. However, MHCLG is already progressing with key policies in this area, including the Construction Products Standards Committee (CPSC). CPSC will make recommendations on construction products and system standards and advise on how the testing regime can be improved.

Building regulations

In addition, a technical review of the guidance to the building regulations with regards to fire safety (Approved Document B) is well underway. This technical review covers a wide range of topics. MHCLG has been clear that where the evidence is well established, there are issues that can and should be addressed quickly. We did not wait for Sir Martin's findings and are prioritising measures to improve fire safety in blocks of flats.

Although Phase 1 of the Inquiry did not examine the impact sprinklers may have had at Grenfell Tower, MHCLG has listened to concerns on sprinklers from residents and building owners and set out our proposals that would see sprinklers installed in a wider range of new high-rise blocks of flats by lowering the height threshold for sprinkler requirements in new buildings.

Evacuation alert systems and internal signage

Sir Martin's report found that the landings in Grenfell Tower were not clearly marked, which hindered fire fighters' ability to find floors. As a result, he recommended that all high-rise buildings' floor numbers are clearly marked and visible in low light and smoky conditions on each landing.

Prior to the publication of Sir Martin's report, alongside proposals for sprinklers, MHCLG's consultation also sought views on proposals to improve wayfinding signage within blocks of flats. It also included proposals to introduce a new type of alarm system to assist the Fire and Rescue Service to evacuate such buildings. This approach is also something Sir Martin has recommended.

Building Safety Regulator

To ensure Government moves swiftly to introduce the new regulatory regime, immediate work will begin to establish the new Building Safety Regulator, initially in shadow form pending legislation. This new Regulator will be established within the Health and Safety Executive – who have a strong and proven track record of working with stakeholders, including industry, other regulators and the public. Immediate action will be taken forward to appoint a Chief Inspector of Buildings and Dame Judith Hackitt will chair a Board to oversee the transition to the new regime.

Recommendations for London Fire Brigade (LFB)

The Phase 1 report identifies that significant changes must be made at LFB. The Home Office welcomes the initial steps taken and the commitment of the Mayor of London and LFB to driving forward the necessary changes. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) – the independent inspectorate for Fire and Rescue Services – also found a number of issues in its recent inspection of LFB which add weight to the Inquiry's findings, and LFB is working to address these in tandem.

Following publication of the Inquiry's report, the Home Secretary wrote to LFB's previous Commissioner in accordance with Section 26 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, requesting an action plan setting out how it intends to implement the recommendations directed to LFB. The Home Office has received this action plan and worked with LFB's senior leadership to review it.

LFB has accepted in full the recommendations directed to them, as well as those for the Fire and Rescue Services more broadly. The Home Office welcomes the steps LFB inform us they have already taken to address the Inquiry's recommendations. These include revisions to policy guidance and advice to ensure personnel are better informed of the risks of fire taking hold in external walls, and the roll out of Fire Survival Guidance refresher training. The Home Office also supports LFB making smoke hoods available as part of breathing apparatus sets on all their fire appliances. The Home Office will work with all Fire and Rescue Services in England to ensure this approach is extended to all those fire appliances that may require it in line with the Inquiry's recommendation.

LFB will continue to report regularly to the Home Office on their progress in delivering against the recommendations, as well as the Mayor and the London Assembly. The Home Office will continue to work with partners such as the NFCC and HMICFRS to gain assurance that the recommendations are being implemented in a way that delivers real change.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service met with LFB's newly appointed Commissioner on 16 January 2020 and will continue to work with him to ensure this work remains a top priority for LFB.

Recommendations for all Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs)

Many of the recommendations require action from all Fire and Rescue Services and several of those directed to LFB have broader implications for all services. The Home Secretary has also written to every service across England to ask that they work together, and through the NFCC, to consider the Inquiry's recommendations. The NFCC has already started to identify a wider programme of work required to do this, building on the existing programme of change.

The NFCC are currently analysing the Phase 1 report's recommendations in detail and are working with all Fire and Rescue Services to develop clear and comprehensive implementation plans, building on their existing work programme. The NFCC will feed the lessons learned from the Inquiry's recommendations into its ongoing review of National Operational Guidance. The Home Office will support the NFCC to ensure the work above is progressed with the urgency it demands and with HMICFRS to track service performance.

The Home Office will also work with the Fire Standards Board to ensure their programme effectively prioritises delivery of key standards in support of the Phase 1 report's recommendations. The newly established Fire Protection Board, chaired by the NFCC, is supported by £10m of Government funding. The Board's initial focus is on providing assurance that the risks for high-rise residential buildings with ACM cladding have been mitigated to a level to ensure safe occupation of residents.

There is significant work to do with a broad range of stakeholder groups who either have responsibility to drive the changes required or who will be impacted by them. To ensure rapid, coordinated action, the Home Office intends to bring sector leaders together at a roundtable event chaired at Ministerial level in the early part of this year.

Interoperability and communications

The Phase 1 report includes a series of recommendations designed to improve the communication arrangements between the three emergency services, their respective control rooms and the incident ground. The Home Office is committed to working with the emergency services to improve interoperability when responding to emergencies. To embed joint working, improve shared situational awareness and a joint understanding of risk arrangements, the Home Office is working with the Interoperability Board to revise Joint Doctrine and immediately reinforce what is expected of responder agencies when major incidents are declared.

The Chair recommended steps be taken to ensure airborne data systems on every National Police Air Service (NPAS) aircraft observing an incident which involves one of the other emergency services defaults to the National Emergency Service User encryption. NPAS aircraft are equipped with imagery systems which capture and transmit images to receivers on the ground. These images are encrypted for security purposes.

NPAS have completed refreshed training to ensure that all Tactical Flight Officers and pilots are up to date and competent with the encryption systems. Since December 2019, all NPAS aircraft are now manually set at the beginning of each shift to ensure data links can be received by all emergency services as the default. NPAS are working on a

technology solution to automate this when aircraft are powered on and this work is due to be completed in July 2020.

The Chair made several recommendations designed to strengthen the operational effectiveness of control rooms. The Home Office will support the improvement of communications between control rooms and Incident Commanders by driving better use of the specialist communications equipment, knowledge and understanding that is already in place. The Home Office will ensure that LFB and the wider fire and rescue community concentrates its efforts on refreshing communication policies and delivering improved training.

The Home Office has provided funding to every Fire and Rescue Service, through Firelink, for the provision of mobile data terminals on fire appliances. This technology assists Fire and Rescue Services in making available relevant and timely operational risk information which is critical in the effective management of incidents.

More broadly, the Home Office is leading a cross-departmental programme to deliver the new Emergency Services Network (ESN) critical communications system, which will replace the current Airwave service used by the emergency services in Britain. ESN will transform emergency services' mobile working by creating a single platform for sharing data, imagery and voice communications.

The Home Office is also working with the NFCC in a number of other areas. These include: reviewing and refreshing current Fire Survival Guidance; the arrangements and guidance for making available operational risk information to fire controls and the incident ground; and to assess the current provision of Breathing Apparatus communications equipment and identify where and how improvements are required.

Next Steps

This response will rightly be scrutinised by Members of Parliament. Sufficient time has passed to digest and consider Sir Martin's substantial report. We remain committed to working closely with other organisations to ensure the right changes are brought about to protect the public and will provide further updates on the steps taken to implement the Chairman's recommendations in due course.

We also look forward to the next phase of the Inquiry. As Phase 1 examined what happened on the night of the fire, Phase 2 will investigate the wider context - including the nature and application of building regulations, the way in which local and central government responded to the fire, and the handling of concerns raised by tenants over many years. Phase 2 will be complex and inevitably take time and we stand ready to assist the Inquiry as it continues to get to the truth of what happened on this night and crucially understand why it happened.

The Grenfell Tower fire remains one of the darkest days in our nation's history. Nothing can bring back the family and friends who people have lost. Nothing can fully capture the heartache and anger that people rightly feel. Our promise as a Government is to work together to ensure that swift and decisive action continues to be taken to address the Inquiry's recommendations, so that no such tragedy can ever be allowed to happen again. We are committed to ensuring all residents are safe in their homes, and feel safe, now and in the future.