



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

PRIME MINISTER

16 June 2017

Dear Colleague,

The tragic events at Grenfell Tower this week have shocked us all deeply. Yesterday I visited the scene for a briefing from the emergency services; this morning I visited Chelsea & Westminster Hospital and met with some of the injured; and this afternoon I went to Kensington to meet with residents and some of those who volunteered to help. I have heard devastating stories from people caught in the fire and all our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones, friends and the homes in which they lived. I also want to pay tribute to our emergency services who have done an outstanding job in the most difficult of circumstances.

A disaster of this scale clearly requires a comprehensive Government response. That is why I have set up a dedicated Grenfell Tower Recovery task force, chaired by me and with representation from a number of Whitehall departments including the Treasury, Home Office and Department for Communities & Local Government. At today's meeting we agreed on a number of actions that the Government will take and I wanted to take this opportunity to set them out to you in detail.

The first priority must be to ensure that people who have been directly affected are cared for and receive the support they need. In practice that means:

- People who lost their homes in the disaster must be rehoused at the earliest possible opportunity and we should aim to do this within 3 weeks at the latest. The Government will work closely with the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea to provide the support required.
- We guarantee that we will rehouse people as close as practically possible to where they previously lived - meaning they can continue to access the same public services such as their local school or local GP. This rehousing would be in the same borough and, if not, a neighbouring borough.
- Until people are rehoused, the cost of temporary accommodation will be met on their behalf.

- The Government will also provide any necessary financial assistance to families who have been rehoused so children and their parents do not incur any extra costs in travelling to their local school.
- A new £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund will be made immediately available to help those who had to flee their homes in the middle of the night leaving all their possessions behind. This money could be used to cover loss of possessions, funerals and emergency supplies.
- The Treasury is working with the banks to ensure that those affected by the disaster who lost possessions like bank cards still have access to their accounts.
- The Department for Work & Pensions is working with local job centres to ensure that those affected have access to the benefits and pensions they would normally receive.
- HMRC have stopped any letters, emails or calls to residents affected – and will explore giving extra time to self-employed people who have payments due.

In addition, we are sending significant central Government support to the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea:

- The Bellwin scheme has been activated – meaning that any immediate and uninsurable extra costs incurred by the council in the aftermath of the disaster will be met by the Government.
- A team of experienced central government civil servants from the Department of Communities & Local Government has been embedded into the local council to assist with efforts.

We must also act quickly to reassure people living in similar buildings that they are safe in their homes. We are therefore:

- Checking at speed with local authorities whether all high-rise buildings in their area have complied with recent fire orders (in layman's terms: work required following an inspection).
- Identifying all high-rise buildings owned or managed by Housing Associations or Local Authorities and conducting a fire safety review of all buildings similar to Grenfell Tower. We will also work with the devolved administrations on this issue.

Once these more immediate strands of work are underway, there also needs to be a full public inquiry into the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. The timeline of the inquiry, its

terms of reference and the name of the judge chairing it will follow shortly. But today I can announce that:

- Residents' voices must be heard by the inquiry and we will provide funding for their legal representation to make sure this happens.
- The families of victims will also be consulted on the terms of reference under which the inquiry proceeds.

A few points also about the wider legacy of fire safety in this country:

- In July 2009 the Lakanal House tower block fire occurred. A coroners' report was published in 2013 making a number of recommendations which we have acted upon.
- The Department for Communities & Local Government published updated guidance on fighting fires in high rise buildings in February 2014 – and wrote to all social housing providers regarding the recommendation to consider retro fitting sprinklers in 2013.
- The coroner also recommended simplifying the guidance to fire safety building regulations (Approved Document B of DCLG 'Building Regulations'). This guidance is currently being reviewed and the emerging findings of the public inquiry will feed into our response.

Finally, I can confirm that the Government **will refund the VAT** raised from a proposed charity single organised by Simon Cowell to a charity that is helping with relief efforts.

This tragedy has united us all in grief. As Prime Minister it is my job to make sure the Government is doing all it can to help those affected and that we learn the necessary lessons so this never happens again. I am determined that we will rise to this challenge.

We will continue to issue updates on the situation in the coming days.

Yours sincerely



The Rt Hon Theresa May MP