



APPG FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE UPDATE REPORT SINCE THE NFSN's LAST MEETING IN BIRMINGHAM ON 9TH SEPTEMBER 2024

FROM RONNIE KING

The APPG met in the Grimond Room Houses of Parliament On the 11th September 2024 shortly after Publication of the Grenfell Tower Phase 2 Final Report, having originally requested to meet MHCLG Minister Rushanara Ali MP at the same meeting.

Unfortunately Government called a debate in the House of Commons at the same time and on the same day, so no Ministers attended, and APPG Members were considerably reduced as quite a number were scheduled to speak in the Commons Debate which had to take precedent over the APPG meeting.

Notwithstanding there was a good discussion at the APPG meeting with contributions from Mary Glendon MP, Baroness Brinton MP, Group Adviser Tom Roche, Fire Protection Association's Chief Executive Dr Gavin Dunne, the Fire Sector Federation's Executive Officer Steve McGuirk, and BAFSA Chief Executive Alistair Perry.

On the same day the Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer spoke in the Commons and promised:

"The Grenfell report will be a "moment of change", - but what will that change be"?

A total of 58 recommendations have been made by the inquiry, including for the construction industry, to the government, and firefighters.

The recommendations are not legally binding, and it is up to the relevant organisations to decide whether to implement them - although all have promised to consider them in full.

And the PM has also made several commitments already.

But the risk is this: often public inquiries do not easily lead to change, and victims have to continue to push for action.

What happens next - set out below - will be crucial. Many will be watching closely to see whether Grenfell, which has already seen decades of failures - will face any more.

What changes have been promised already?

Sir Keir Starmer has said the government will look at all 58 recommendations in detail and respond within six months.

But in the Commons earlier, he already committed to a few promises, although the details are light:

Speeding up the removal of unsafe cladding

There are still buildings with unsafe cladding, Sir Keir said, and it is taking too long to remove it.

He said the government will take steps to speed up getting it removed - including potentially forcing freeholders to assess their buildings and fix issues within a set time. This could involve a legal requirement "if that is what it takes".

More details will be set out in the autumn, the PM said.

Grenfell companies to be blocked from winning government contracts

The government is writing to all companies found by the inquiry to be part of the failings as a first step to stopping them being awarded government contracts.

Reform the construction products industry

The government will also reform the construction products industry that make deadly cladding, "so homes are made with safe materials", Sir Keir said - without giving more details.

Ensure social landlords are held to account

Sir Keir also said the government "will ensure that tenants and their leaseholders can never again be ignored and social landlords are held to account for the decency and safety of their homes".



PM apologises to Grenfell families

Will anyone be prosecuted?

It will be a long wait before we know if any prosecutions are being brought - something bereaved families have criticised.

Police and prosecutors have said they will need until the end of 2025 to complete their investigation, before handing it on to the Crown Prosecution Service.

And then final decisions on potential criminal charges will not come until **the end of 2026** - more than two years away.

Nineteen companies or organisations are currently under investigation, along with 58 individuals, **police said in May.**

Detectives say their investigation - which began the day of the fire - is independent of the public inquiry and under different legal rules, so they can't simply use the report's findings to bring charges.

But they say they will go through the report "line by line, alongside the evidence from the criminal investigation" - and that will take at least 12 to 18 months.

Met Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Stuart Cundy added he "cannot imagine" what it is like for the victims to have such a long wait - but promised they will do "everything we can to secure justice".

What are the potential charges?

Potential offences under consideration include corporate manslaughter, gross negligence manslaughter, perverting the course of justice, misconduct in public office, health and safety offences, fraud, and offences under the fire safety and building regulations.

Police are examining the role of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and its tenant management organisation, companies involved in doing the work, and others which supplied and manufactured building materials

The day after the APPG meeting, Parliament again went into Recess for Party Conferences but I continued to pursue Government Ministers for a meeting.

From 23rd to 25th September Quite a number of APPG members attended the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool and visited the Fire Protection Association's stand.

27th September discussion with Tom Roche re Schools and DfE (BB100 etc) Also exchanged correspondence with Helen Newton (NFCC re timing of raising the Schools issue with the new Government.

7th October I attended Westminster Parliament to catch up with Members and Staff after Party Conferences.

8th October it was announced that this date will now be World Fire Prevention Day, and recognised as such each year.

BS 8674 Standard for Fire Risk Assessor Competency and capacity was now out for comment. (from Home Office).

9th October I attended Westminster Parliament Terrace Pavilion to celebrate the achievements of Sir Peter Bottomley MP in relation to Leasehold Reform. Met Mike Amesbury Chairman of the Leasehold/Common hold Reform Group.

10th October Announcement that the construction of a new car park at Luton Airport is underway which includes plans for a fire suppression system. Helena Dollimore MP asked to join the APPG (Fire Safety & Rescue)

11th October update on LFB sprinkler saves – notified APPG members.

Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Secretary of State was determined to ban section 21 'no fault' evictions asap. As MP's debated the Renters' Rights Bill in Parliament.

11th October PEEPS ZOOM meeting with Baroness Brinton and Baroness Grey-Thompson along with Martin Boyd.

Several meetings with Martin Boyd Mike Wood and Matthew Armer re Fire Doors – over unnecessary costs of replacement fire stopping.

18th October Baroness Grey Thompson reported being refused a personal evacuation plan by Travelodge Woking.- then locked out!! Followed up with Head office and resolved.

23rd October Invitations received for PPG Members to attend London Fire Brigade Carol Concert at Westminster Cathedral.

MHCLG Building Safety Minister, with responsibility also for Grenfell Tower (Rushanara Ali MP) was shortly after replaced by Alex Norris MP, whom I persisted in making contact with for a meeting with the Group.

28th October Chancellor Rachael Reeves pledges £1.4bn for 'crumbling' classrooms - BBC News

I took this up with NFCC Helen Newton: “Thanks Ronnie – much appreciated.

We’re also not clear at this stage if the money is new or protecting existing funding but I see this as an opportunity to welcome the Government’s focus on the safety of school buildings and use that as a lever to establish a new relationship on BB100”.

Fortuitously Nick Coleshill and BAFSA Chief Executive Ali Perry brought to my a ‘sprinkler save’ in Student accommodation in Nottinghamshire and also raised it with Nottinghamshire’s Chief Fire Officer, who was strongly supportive of automatic fire sprinkler protection. I subsequently corresponded with Fire Chief CFO Craig Parkin who enlightened me with the connections to FIRE in Nottinghamshire by MP’s. This provided me with the opportunity to invite Minister Alex Norris MP to the Group’s next meeting to discuss Grenfell.

An hour’s meeting has been duly arranged in Parliament albeit on 7th January 2025, and I have forwarded a DRAFT agenda, which refers to Nottinghamshire’s support for Fire Sprinkler protection below:

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ALL- PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP



**Chairman – Bob Blackman CBE MP – Vice Chair – Mary Glendon MP
Co-Chairs – Baroness Brinton – Lord Goddard**

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ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE GROUP
INAUGURAL MEETING - DATE AND VENUE: 7th JANUARY 2025
HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT WESTMINSTER
(Portcullis House Room "Q")

At 1pm

DRAFT

1. Welcome and apologies from APPG Chairman Bob Blackman MP
2. **APPG FIRE SAFETY & RESCUE – MEETING WITH BUILDING SAFETY MINISTER ALEX NORRIS MP – TO DISCUSS THE GRENFELL TOWER PHASE 2 FINAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

MATTERS TO RAISE FROM RECOMMENDATIONS IN PHASE 2 FINAL REPORT:

1. **There should also be a single fire safety management government regulator. This would help clarify the present position which is split across the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.**

Lord Goddard recently led a debate in the House of Lords regarding this matter concluding that Fire is fragmented across a number of Departments, and an integrated approach was necessary. The Department for Education for example should NOT be allowed to determine the standards for Fire Safety in Schools, under different criteria to the remainder of Buildings in England.

Scotland and Wales has far more stringent standards of Fire Safety in this regard than those in England. Building Bulletin 100 is the DfE's own Fire Safety Design guide for new schools and the 2007 edition remains extant. However the Department is NOT enforcing this and is allowing most new schools built NOT to include automatic fire sprinkler protection despite the currently established Design Guide mandating them.

2. **One Inquiry recommendation in particular is that the Home Office reconsider its guidance on personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPS) contained in its guidance on Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats.**

The Home Office originally declared in 2022 that it was too difficult to ensure that PEEPs were in place for every individual who needs one, so it should not be a statutory duty for building owners to produce such plan. This, I understand, is currently under review, particularly in relation to those with disabilities.

The APPG has strong views on this matter with two members of the Group in particular having significant personal experience of what is needed and necessary for those with disabilities.

3. The government should establish a properly resourced national college of fire and rescue to provide training, education, research and equipment, develop policy and set standards.

There is currently a Fire Service College based in Moreton-in-Marsh – It was owned and run by Government for many years but more recently taken over by CAPITA.

Is this being considered as an appropriate facility to fulfil the recommendation?

Some members of the Group will have strong views about this.

4. The government should establish a publicly accessible database of recommendations from select committees, inquiry panels and related investigations, with details of actions taken. The relevant minister should report on this annually to Parliament.

Following the Coroner's 50 day Inquest and report into the Lakanal House Inquest ending in March 2013 a recommendation was made from the Coroner to Government's Secretary of State to: "ENCOURAGE SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE RETROFITTING OF AUTOMATIC FIRE SPRINKLER PROTECTION IN SUCH HIGH RISE PREMISES" – THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S SECRETARY OF STATE AT THE TIME DID NOT ENCOURAGE THIS – BUT SIMPLY REFERRED THEM TO THE CORONER'S LETTER SAYING IT WAS A LOCAL MATTER (AGAINST THE STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE APPG AND THE LONDON FIRE COMMISSIONER – AND DESPITE THE FACT THAT BRE HAD UPDATED IT'S FINDINGS IN 2012 THAT AUTOMATIC FIRE SPRINKLER PROTECTION WAS COST EFFECTIVE IN MOST BLOCKS OF PURPOSE BUILT FLATS (IRRESPECTIVE OF HEIGHT))

(Recent correspondence from Craig Parkin, the Chief Fire Officer of Nottinghamshire said: “to add my own support for the much wider application of sprinkler systems in the built environment, more and more we see the impact of significant loss to fire, when such interventions can greatly reduce the impact that is often felt much longer by communities, for example the need for rehousing residents or the education of our children when schools are affected.

Here at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and wider National Fire Chiefs Council we will continue to advocate for such an approach”.

The APPG asks: “When will Government Ministers listen and act upon the views of the professionals in the field”?

5. A recommendation that there should be a new single construction regulator.

and **A chief construction adviser should be appointed by government, with a department and staff.**

The Group presumes that this will be outside the scope of one Government Department being responsible for FIRE with a single fire safety management government regulator?

6. The definition of HRBs should be reviewed, looking at criteria other than just height, such as occupant vulnerability.

The APPG fully supports this and members and officers will contribute individually.

7. The government should appoint an independent panel to review competition in building control, and consider whether this function should be carried out by a single national body.

The Group generally supports this recommendation and members will contribute individually.

8. The new construction regulator should explore the potential for establishing a national database of building safety-related data.

This recommendation makes a lot of sense and is supported subject to any individual comments raised by members at the meeting.

9. Construction Products – Regulations and approach

A key element of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry findings fell on the matters surrounding the testing, certification, and marketing of products. The Morrell/Day report was commissioned and has languished in consideration for some time. The progress on this matter is a growing gap in the response to the findings of the Inquiry and one that is hard to understand.

It is startling to see Dame Judith Hackitt raise this in an important lecture at the Chartered Institute of Building noting “One of the greatest frustrations is the lack of progress on assuring construction products.”

Perhaps the Minister can give an update on the progress made on this matter?

10. Building Safety Act - Report on certain safety-related matters

Section 21 of the Building Safety Act contains matters that are relevant to the APPG and were provided to ensure key items were addressed by the new Building Safety Regulator.

(a) carry out a cost-benefit analysis of making regular inspections of, and testing and reporting on, the condition of electrical installations in relevant buildings;

(b) consider what further provision under the Building Act 1984, or in guidance under that Act, may be made about—

- stairs and ramps in relevant buildings,
- emergency egress of disabled persons from relevant buildings, and
- automatic water fire suppression systems in relevant buildings, with a view to improving the safety of persons in or about relevant buildings, and carry out a cost-benefit analysis of the making of that provision.

These items were referenced in the Building Safety Regulators strategic plan but there has been no further comments on these items. The Group notes that the clock is ticking on

these items and asks if the Minister has received assurance from the BSR that work is ongoing.

11. Review of Approved Document B

The intervening period since the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy has seen several interim revisions to Approved Document B. The latest one was delivered in September 2024 which led to the removal of the National Classes for Products (Class 0 etc) and sprinklers in care homes.

The wholesale review of the document and actions to deliver such reviews were taken on by the then Ministry. This has since been passed over to the Building Safety Regulator. The last updated position on the review is dated 6 June 2022. Research has been procured but its status and publication of their findings is unclear. The Building Safety Regulator references the ongoing review within their strategic plan.

This matter received further attention within the recommendations Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 report noting issues with clarity, technical matters and input. (Sections 113.10 to 113.14 refer) It may be that this will form part of the response from government targeted for March 2025.

The recent Fundamental Review may give some much-needed clarity in terms of language and intent. However, this is not the technical review which has been much needed to address items that were raised in the scoping work some 5 years ago let alone addressing emerging risk issues appears to have stagnated.

Whilst we recognise this is in the hands of the BSR to propose changes can the Minister provide an update on progress or policy direction/timeline for outcomes expressed to him in his regular meetings with the BSR?

12. In phase 1 of the Report 33.26

Quote from Public Inquiry Phase 1: “Sprinkler systems - no doubt have a very valuable part to play in the overall scheme of fire safety measures, but whether such a system would be likely to have suppressed the fire in Flat 16 or prevented it from escaping into the cladding before the firefighters could extinguish it is not something that was investigated in Phase 1. I have therefore heard no evidence about the use of sprinklers generally, their effectiveness under different conditions, or about the cost and disruption that would be caused by installing them in existing buildings. In those circumstances I cannot make any recommendation at this stage about the installation of sprinklers in existing buildings, although the government’s response to previous recommendations will form an important part of the investigation to be carried out at Phase 2”. THE APPG NOTES THAT THIS WAS NEVER FURTHER COMMENTED UPON IN PHASE 2!!! AND WHICH REMAINS A SERIOUS CONCERN FOR THE GROUP

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS MEMBERS MAY WISH TO RAISE

CLOSE OF MEETING – CHAIRMAN. ”

The Group’s current list of members is 23 and still growing. See list below:

APPG Fire Safety & Rescue – Members

Officer and Chairman Bob Blackman CBE MP

Officer and Vice Chair Mary Glindon MP

Officer and Co Vice Chair – Baroness Brinton

Officer and Co Vice Chair – Lord Goddard

Co Vice Chair – Rt. Hon. Sir Desmond Swayne MP

Co Vice Chair – Lord John Hendy KC

Apsana Begum MP

Joe Powell MP

Andy Slaughter MP

Mary Foy MP

Baroness Grey-Thompson

Ann Davies MP

Sir Geoffrey Clifton Brown MP

Chris Webb MP
Earl of Lytton
Jim Shannon MP
Lord Jim Knight
Lord Naseby
Rachael Maskell MP
Kim Johnson MP
Anna Sabine MP
Helena Dollimore MP
Kim Leadbeater MP

24th October I wrote a DRAFT contribution for Lord Goddard to give at the Annual Fire Conference in London on the 24th October, His contribution was well received.

4th November attended Fire Sector Federation Consultation Forum meeting online

6th November House rises for short November Recess.

22nd November attended Lords Debate Grenfell Tower – Baroness Brinton – Lord Porter and Earl of Lytton contributed.

29th November APPG Members invited to LFB Fire Aid Film presentation at Somerset House.

2nd December Commons Debate – Grenfell Tower – 2nd December attended.

Ronnie King OBE, O.St.J, QFSM, F.I.Fire E
Adviser & Hon. Sec. APPG