



30th August 2024

Right Honourable Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
By email

Dear Minister

THE DAGENHAM FIRE

We are writing to you to request dialogue between you and social housing tenants in the wake of the Dagenham fire. We are happy to arrange for tenants to meet with you.

Whilst we do not purport to be a national representative body for social housing tenants, we are one of very few bodies with a national tenant membership and which has met previously with Ministers and, as such, we consider we have a duty to pass on the concerns and worries being raised by many tenants about the Dagenham fire and the potential for further tragedies in the social housing sector.

We are of course equally concerned in respect of any tenure – this fire affected tenants of private landlords, and defective cladding could also affect homeowners. The simple point is that no lives should be at risk because of defective cladding.

Seven years ago, 72 social housing tenants lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The Stop Social Housing Stigma Campaign came into existence at that time because tenants made it clear that the stigma that tenants felt – and which led to Grenfell residents having their concerns ignored – was one of their most important issues.

Politicians at that time told us that this would be a turning point. However, a recent article in Inside Housing now illustrates the scale of the problem:

“The latest report from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) revealed that 20% of social housing blocks with life-critical fire safety cladding defects have “unclear” remediation plans, equating to nearly 500 buildings. Overall, of the 4,630 residential buildings standing at 11 metres or higher that have unsafe cladding, 2,331 have not started remediation as of the end of July 2024, MHCLG said. Remediation work has either started or completed on 2,299 buildings. Of these, 1,350 buildings (29%) have completed remediation works. The 4,630 buildings identified by the department with unsafe cladding has risen in the past couple of months, up from 4,374 in May and 4,613 in June”.

It is appalling that seven years since Grenfell, we are still in this position.

We know that this is a complex problem that you have inherited, and we welcome that you have said that the Government expects more from regulators and partners to make sure action is being taken now to make homes safe. We also agree with you that “seven years on from Grenfell, action has been far too slow and the fire in Dagenham is a horrific reminder of the risk unsafe cladding still poses to far too many people”

However, there is an urgent need for you to reassure social housing tenants – and indeed tenants of private landlords and homeowners – that there is a clear timetable for when defective cladding and associated issues will be fully addressed.

At least on this occasion, the bravery and professionalism of firefighters who were able to adjust to a fire situation that should not have happened meant that no one lost their lives. However, people have lost their homes and possessions and have to rebuild their lives.

We know that you will agree that we never want to wake up again hearing that more social housing tenants, or anyone else, have lost their lives because of the national defective cladding scandal.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours

Lynne Brosnan, Chair, Stop Social Housing Stigma
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cc. Matthew Pennycock MP