

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Communities and
Local Government
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Dear Secretary of State,

The fire at Grenfell Tower has been an unimaginable tragedy and of course it brings back difficult memories for Southwark, where we have learned many lessons from the tragic fire at Lakanal in 2009, which killed six people. It is essential that the Government takes urgent action to investigate and respond to the causes of the Grenfell fire through a robust and thorough inquiry, working with local authorities to identify and take immediate action on any buildings at risk. Central government must also provide assurance that councils will be properly resourced to carry out necessary fire safety works identified in the wake of the Grenfell fire.

Southwark Council has taken extensive action to improve fire safety in our tower blocks. Since 2009 we have spent £62 million on our fire risk assessment programme and associated fire safety works, for all council housing in the borough. In response to Grenfell the council carried out an immediate review of cladding and related installation on council properties, confirming that none of the 174 tower blocks in the borough have combustible cladding. We are taking nothing for granted and the council is now carrying out a full further fire assessment of all tower blocks in the borough. We have also appointed national fire safety expert, Ben Bradford, and his specialist firm of consulting engineers, to carry out an independent review of the council's fire strategy and fire risk assessments. As well as taking these actions in our own borough, Southwark has played a key role in managing the response to the Grenfell fire. The council has been supporting colleagues at Kensington and Chelsea and our Chief Executive Eleanor Kelly is jointly leading the central command centre with John Barradell, CEO of the City of London Corporation.

The tragedy of Grenfell means we must all look again to ensure that everything possible is being done at both a local and national level to ensure residents' safety. The fact that hundreds of buildings across the country have failed emergency fire safety checks is deeply concerning. This is a national emergency, which requires a national response backed by effective and appropriate action by local councils. Residents' safety and security is paramount and it is imperative that nothing stands in the way of understanding why this tragedy happened and what needs to be done to ensure it never happens again. In the wake of Lakanal the council learnt lessons and took extensive action to improve fire safety in our borough. The Government must do the same; acting on the coroner's recommendations to DCLG following the Lakanal inquests.

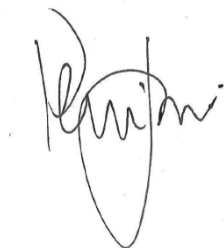
Alongside the public inquiry into Grenfell, we believe that government should develop a national fire safety strategy, which takes into account the voice and experience of local government. This should include a review of fire safety regulations to ensure they are fit for purpose, and to ensure that understanding and implementation of regulations is consistent across the country. Since the Lakamal fire Southwark Council has embedded fire safety in our policies and procedures at every level and the council has a team of 15 specialist fire safety officers. Central government should ensure that all local authorities have the necessary fire safety expertise to deal with this challenge. Government must also provide extra funding for local authorities to cover additional fire safety works, including provision for leaseholder properties, which cannot be met through the council's HRA.

It is essential that central government makes funding available for councils to carry out the fire safety measures required in the wake of Grenfell. Fire safety is a national issue and the financial burden for these works must not fall on already stretched council budgets. Like many councils Southwark is investing in high quality housing for our residents, but this work will be jeopardised if government fails to properly resource councils to deal with this national emergency. Councils should not be forced to choose between the safety of our residents and the quality of their homes. Instead, the Government should raise the borrowing cap for local authorities and guarantee national funding for additional fire safety works.

Southwark has a responsibility to all its residents, not just those living in our council blocks. While we will take full ownership of fire safety in our properties, we would ask that government provides reassurance and advice to councils regarding the status of other buildings within their boroughs, as it is clear the repercussions of Grenfell will extend much wider than council tower blocks.

Local government has been at the forefront of dealing with crises in recent weeks and months. Staff have gone above and beyond in responding to emergencies, including the London Bridge attack in our own borough. At Grenfell, where the initial response was far from adequate, other local authorities have stepped up and are now leading the response. In the wake of this national tragedy central government must now provide urgent reassurance to local authorities that it will properly resource councils to take the necessary steps to ensure residents' safety, as part of coherent national strategy for fire safety. Central government must use every tool at its disposal, including the coroner's recommendations from the Lakamal inquests and whatever learning comes from Grenfell, to ensure that a tragedy on this scale never happens again.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Peter John, OBE
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**



**Councillor Stephanie Cryan
CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING**