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Date: **27/08/2024**

To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Building safety: a national scandal

FBU members will have watched in horror at the fire in Dagenham this weekend. Another residential block suffered a significant fire. Large numbers of residents were rescued or evacuated by firefighters. The media and the public have correctly asked; how can this still happen, seven years after the Grenfell disaster?

I am sure all FBU members will wish to pass on best wishes to the members of the London Fire Brigade who attended the fire, rescued, and evacuated the residents and who fought the fire. Sadly, we know from experience that some media comment can easily turn to questioning the role and responsibility of firefighters and of the fire and rescue service. Our task is to defend our members where appropriate, while ensuring that any necessary lessons are learned and applied. We have also consistently pointed out that the ability of the fire service to operate effectively is affected by the state of the built environment, including by failings in regulations. In this case, what is immediately obvious is that the building safety crisis highlighted by Grenfell has not been resolved.

The scale of the problem

Below are some of the key statistics which highlight the scale of the problem and, therefore the scale of the challenge facing firefighters and our service when responding to such incidents.

These figures are published at various intervals by the relevant government department, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The figures apply to England only. The figures provided below relate to various reporting dates.

MHCLG has identified that the total number of residents in residential buildings over 11 metres tall in England is 4.25 million residents. This includes 1.31 million (30%) in buildings 18 metres

or more, or at least seven storeys tall and 2.93 million (70%) in buildings between 11 and 18 metres in height. Overall, the proportion of the population of England living in high or mid-rise flats is approximately 8%.

	Estimated dwellings	Total residents
18 metres or more, or at least seven storeys	691,000	1,310,000
11-18m	1,629,000	2,930,000
Total	2,320,000	4,250,000

July 2024: Overall remediation

Of the 4,630 residential buildings 11 metres and over in height with unsafe cladding the department is monitoring, as at 31 July 2024:

- 1,350 buildings (29%) have completed remediation, including those awaiting building control sign off
- 949 building (20%) have started remediation
- 2,331 buildings (50%) have not started remediation

ACM remediation

As of 31 July 2024, the department has identified 499 high-rise residential and publicly owned buildings identified with ACM cladding systems unlikely to meet Building Regulations, an increase of one since the end of June.

- 438 buildings (88% of all buildings) have completed ACM remediation – an increase of one since the end of June. Of these, 411 buildings (82% of all buildings) have received building control sign off – an increase of 3 since the end of June.
- 488 buildings (98% of all buildings) have started or completed ACM remediation – an increase of one since the end of June. Of these, 471 buildings (94% of all buildings) have removed ACM cladding – an increase of 2 since the end of June.

There are an estimated 26,100 – 29,500 dwellings in private and social sector buildings that have completed remediation, and a further 5,000 – 5,100 dwellings in occupied private and social sector buildings that have yet to be remediated.

Social housing sector

As at 31 July 2024, 2,414 social buildings 11 metres and over in height have been identified as having life-critical fire-safety cladding defects.

Of the 2,414 buildings identified to have unsafe cladding:

- 663 buildings (27%) are reported to have completed remediation
- 1,208 buildings (50%) are reported to have started or completed remediation
- 717 buildings (30%) are reported to have not started remediation but have plans in place

Never again: end de-regulation and invest in safety.

The figures above show the scale of the scandal of residential building safety failure. We have pointed out during the public inquiry in the Grenfell disaster that these failings follow political

decisions taken at the highest level. Governments have overseen a reduction in safety standards which has enabled building owners and developers to undermine and remove key elements of building safety.

At the same time, the fire service has suffered unprecedented funding cuts with a consequential loss of jobs and resources. This has undermined the ability to inspect buildings and take enforcement action where appropriate. It has also weakened and undermined the operational response. Fire service response times are the slowest in decades and, increasingly, crews are being sent under-crewed to such incident. There is a complete lack of any common approach to the issue of PDAs for residential block, with each fire and rescue service adopting its own separate policy.

These failings are a recipe for disaster. The FBU has been utterly vindicated in the stance we have taken since Grenfell. We will press the new government at Westminster to listen to the voice of front-line professionals. We need new national standards; a new statutory advisory body for fire policy. We need investment in our service to tackle years of underfunding and to build a fire service for the future.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary