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Circular: 2024HOC0415MW

Date: 05 November 2024

To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

National Audit Office report on dangerous cladding

The National Audit Office published its report, ***Dangerous cladding: the government's remediation portfolio***, on 4 November. The report shows that the cladding crisis is even worse than expected, with more homes and other buildings still clad with flammable materials. Remediation is slow and might take until 2037 – twenty years after the Grenfell Tower fire – until the risks are dealt with. This is a national disgrace.

The National Audit Office is a public spending watchdog at Westminster, whose reports are used by MPs to hold central government to account. This report covers England only. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) oversees the government's cladding response for England.

The report is a damning indictment of the cladding crisis, confirming the FBU's worst fears about how cladding remediation has been handled by governments since the Grenfell Tower fire. It will require a strong response from the new Labour government to tackle the scandal they have been left with.

Key findings

The National Audit Office report found that by August 2024:

- There was an estimated total of 9,000-12,000 buildings of 11 metres or higher with unsafe cladding that require remediation
- Only 4,771 of those buildings taller than 11 metres with unsafe cladding have been identified for remediation

- Only 1,392 of those buildings had completed their remediation by August 2024
- This affects at least 258,000 households
- MHCLG does not even know how many low-rise buildings (below 11 metres) have dangerous cladding
- The campaign group End Our Cladding Scandal reports that up to three million people are caught up in the cladding crisis.

Residents

The report shows how residents have suffered and continue to suffer during this cladding crisis, both from the cost of waking watches and from costs of removing the cladding.

In 2020, MHCLG estimated the monthly average (median) waking watch costs were £11,361 per building and £137 per home.

In 2020, MHCLG estimated the monthly average (median) costs of £104 per home for buildings receiving Waking Watch Relief funding, or average (mean) costs of £169 per month per home.

MHCLG admitted to the National Audit Office that it was not yet able to report on progress to 'integrate residents' voice' – in other words how it would give residents a say in tackling the problem.

Overall costs

The National Audit Office report also identified some damning costs of remediation for society:

- MHCLG's current best estimate for total remediation costs is £16 billion, but may end up as high as £22 billion
- MHCLG expects to spend £9 billion of central government money on the remediation of buildings, but has capped taxpayer funding at £5.1 billion by raising contributions from other sources
- MHCLG expects to recover £700 million from developers through the Developer Remediation Programme
- A Building Safety Levy charged on new residential developments is expected to raise around £3.4 billion over 12 years to cover some of the costs. But this levy won't start until 2025.

The FBU is demanding that central government make the cladding crisis an urgent priority. The fact that thousands of residential buildings remain wrapped in dangerous cladding is a national disgrace.

The union stated from day one that this crisis was due to failures of government due to the obsession with deregulation.

The FBU is demanding that developers and construction firms are made to pay the costs of remediation and the process sped up. The union wants tenants, residents and firefighters involved in the oversight of the work. The FBU supports campaigns such as End Our Cladding Scandal, who have raised these issues over many years.

The FBU is demanding more funding for the fire and rescue service, which is a key enforcement authority for cladding and other fire safety risks. In England, there are fewer than 1,200 fire safety inspectors, with only half of those qualified to issue enforcement or prohibition notices. The fire and rescue service urgently needs more firefighters to carry out this vital inspection work.

Yours in unity,

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

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/pw