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Our Ref: MW/sll

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Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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Dear Prime Minister

Grenfell Tower – public inquiry

You have announced a public inquiry into the terrible tragedy at Grenfell Tower. We met briefly at the scene and you will be aware that the firefighters who responded to that horror so magnificently and heroically are members of the Fire Brigades Union. I am sure you appreciate therefore that the FBU has a central role to play in everything which arises from the events of last week, including any public inquiry and related inquest. The Fire Brigades Union is uniquely placed, being the only UK organisation which plays a role in every inquest relating to the deaths of firefighters; inquests where questions are addressed which are likely to be similar to many of those raised in relation to Grenfell Tower.

I therefore set out our initial position on what needs to be done.

Open and transparent

You are aware of the scale of anger among the local community. This is entirely understandable considering the appalling loss of life and the failings in the support mechanisms put in place so far. The process of establishing an inquiry, including terms of reference, should therefore be open, transparent and inclusive. Before any further announcements are made there should be full consultation with all interested parties. This would be best done through direct meetings with your officials. This consultation should include:

- Families of the victims and their representatives
- Survivors and their representatives
- London Fire Brigade
- LFEPA
- Fire Brigades Union
- Mayor of London
- Others within the broader fire sector
- The parliamentary opposition

Consideration should also be given to involving the devolved governments of the UK.

The Grenfell Tower victims

It is essential that the victims of this tragedy are fully involved in and consulted on the process. They should be provided immediately with full legal aid – or other appropriate funding - to enable them to participate in the process without the additional pressure of high legal costs. We call on you to state clearly that this will happen.

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Status of the inquiry

We seek clarification of your intention regarding the status of the inquiry. We assume you intend this to be a full judicial inquiry led by a judge and we seek confirmation of this and clarification of the relationship between the inquiry and the inquest process. We seek your assurances that the process will commence speedily with a clear timetable.

The inquiry must include the ability for all interested parties to be represented with representation throughout the process as core participants. Funding should be provided by central government to support this. This must include at least:

- Families of the victims and their representatives
- Survivors and their representatives
- London Fire Brigade
- LFEPA
- Fire Brigades Union
- Mayor of London

The inquiry must have the power of compulsion of witnesses and documents and the ability to make use of assessors. A clear timescale should be set out, including any intention for an interim report and the timescale for that.

Current and former government advisors

This and previous governments have employed various people to provide advice on fire and rescue matters which will be considered during this process. Such individuals may be required to give evidence at the inquiry as witnesses to advice they have previously given, or in respect of departmental or ministerial decisions. It would, therefore, not be appropriate for them to play a role in determining the terms of reference nor indeed to play any other role in establishing the inquiry. I seek your assurances on this.

Involvement in the process

The inquiry must obviously look at the specific causes of the incident and the response to it. It must also look more widely at the background to the fire. One question is how it was possible for this to happen in the UK in 2017.

In this regard it is inevitable that the decisions of government ministers must be examined, particularly of ministers in the Home Office (responsible for the fire and rescue service) and DCLG (formerly responsible for the fire service and currently with responsibilities over housing matters and local government). I ask you to take steps to ensure that current or former ministers in these areas do not play a role in developing the terms of reference or the establishment of the inquiry.

Consultation should take place on the terms of reference with interested parties. These should include the parties mentioned above. We are keen to engage in any such process.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference must be broad enough to address both the immediate causes of the incident and the response to it as well as the institutional and planning background.

The terms of reference must address:

A. Immediate causes and response

1. Immediate causes of the fire.
2. Ownership and management of the block.
3. Details of refurbishment and original design.
4. Planning process for refurbishment, including fire risk assessment.
5. Cladding materials and installation; other alterations to the building.
6. Escape routes.
7. Stay put advice in light of building alterations.
8. LFB operational response, including operational decisions, practice and resources.

B. Background to the immediate causes

1. The scale of the issue in the UK – building stock; international comparisons.
2. Fire protection of residential tower blocks, including the impact of refurbishment (including, fire alarm systems, cladding, internal alterations, windows, escape routes etc.).
3. Sprinklers, including retro-fitting.
4. Regulations and guidance regarding standards of materials, including cladding.
5. Responsibilities for fire protection in residential tower blocks or other large residential buildings.
6. The regulatory regime relating to fire protection, including impact of the Regulatory Reform Order.
7. Regulation of fire risk assessors.
8. Impact of changes to regulations and the regulatory regime relating to building control, planning, fire safety and the fire and rescue service.
9. Resources for and role of local authorities in fire protection in residential tower blocks or other large residential buildings, including any changes to local authority building control.
10. Resources for, and role of, fire and rescue services in fire protection in residential tower blocks or other large residential buildings.
11. Resources for, and role of, fire and rescue services (including the LFB) in operational response to this and incidents in other large residential buildings.
12. The system of, and funding for, fire research in the UK.
13. The impact of devolution on differing fire safety regimes across the UK.
14. The regulatory and structural background to the management, planning and oversight of fire and rescue services, including the impact of the abolition of previous central standards and oversight bodies.
15. The resourcing and training of technical fire safety within the fire and rescue service.
16. Whether or not lessons from previous fires, in the UK or elsewhere, have been addressed, including identifying any reasons for any failure to do so.
17. The role and performance of central government departments, including ministers, (primarily Home Office and DCLG) in relation to the issues identified above.

I am sure other parties will have similar and overlapping issues which they consider should be addressed. We may also wish to add to this list. Most importantly, as set out above, we seek a quick but full consultation with all interested parties to ensure that the victims and survivors, firefighters and the wider public can have confidence in the process.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack'.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary