



Ein cyf/Our ref:

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Dear Bob,

I wanted to write directly to members of your group to set out the work the Welsh Government is currently undertaking to improve building safety so people can feel safe in their own home.

I know there have been lots of reports in the media following various announcements by Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove, which relate to England. This can make it difficult to understand what's happening in Wales. You may also have questions about whether we will be doing similar things in Wales and about the progress of schemes, such as the Welsh Building Safety Fund.

We have been working hard on a whole-building approach to building safety – to *repair* defects and *reform* building safety standards – in high-rise and medium-rise buildings.

Our repair programme goes beyond just replacing external cladding. It includes compartmentation, fire alert and evacuation and suppression systems.

This whole-building approach puts people's safety first but is more complex than one which only deals with cladding. It is also more expensive. We have earmarked £375m over the next three years to invest in repair work – this is double the population share of what the UK Government has said it plans to spend in equivalent areas in England in this period.

At the heart of our approach is the fundamental belief that developers should contribute towards the costs of fixing these problems. Leaseholders and residents should not have to foot the bill.

Repair

Our repair programme is underway now. There are three main schemes involved:

1. Repair of non-compliant cladding in high-rise buildings
2. The Welsh Building Safety Fund
3. The Leaseholder Support Scheme

In the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, 12 private and three social sector high-rise (18m) residential buildings were found to have non-compliant ACM cladding in Wales. Work to

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

remove and replace non-compliant ACM cladding has been successfully completed on the three social sector high-rise residential buildings. We provided £3m to complete this work.

Work has either started, or action plans are in place to progress work, on the 12 buildings in the private sector. This work is being funded by buildings' owners and developers.

In September 2021 we opened up the **Welsh Building Safety Fund** for residential buildings 11m or higher. It is designed to scope out any necessary work and help to prioritise buildings for repair work.

We received 248 expressions of interest and have now completed digital surveys on those buildings to determine whether more intrusive surveys are needed. More than 100 buildings have been identified for these further intrusive surveys. We expect this survey work to be completed by the end of the summer.

These surveys are the entry point for buildings seeking support for repair and remediation works. As I said at the start of this letter, we are taking a whole-building approach because this is the only way to ensure all the work necessary to make a building fire safety compliant is completed and protects residents and leaseholders from facing significant additional costs.

We have earmarked £375m over the next three years to invest in building safety work and we believe that leaseholders should not have to pay towards these repairs.

We are finalising plans to create a **Leaseholder Support Scheme**. This would be a fund for leaseholders who are facing severe financial hardship as a result of costs relating to building defects.

The fund is being designed to help those people who are struggling financially and unable to sell their properties because of escalating costs associated with fire safety issues. It will give eligible leaseholders access to the right support to meet their individual circumstances, including an option to sell their property and, where appropriate, to either move on or rent the property back. I hope to be able to announce more details soon and open the scheme in June.

Reform

Our work to reform building safety so we don't repeat the same mistakes, which led to the Grenfell fire, is already underway. We are working to fundamentally and comprehensively change the culture and legislative framework in Wales to design out fire safety risks for the life cycle of future buildings.

We have a long history of reforming building regulations – we were the first part of the UK to pass a law requiring fire sprinkler systems to be installed in new and converted homes in Wales in 2013. We published a White Paper consultation on building safety in spring 2021. The feedback from this will lead to the development of a Building Safety Reform Bill, which will be introduced this Senedd term.

We continue to work with the UK Government to reform UK building safety legislation, which covers Wales and England.

This includes changes to the Fire Safety Act 2021 and joint working on the UK Building Safety Act 2022, which came into force in October 2021 and April 2022 respectively.

You may have read recently that a **developer's pledge** has been introduced in England and a list of those which have already signed up to the pledge. I was very disappointed when Michael Gove announced this because I have been working with him for a long time to introduce a UK-wide pledge. A UK "pledge" would commit developers to repairing buildings they were involved in developing.

Mr Gove's decision to introduce a pledge for England-only could make it harder to ensure all developers take their responsibilities to contribute towards the costs of fixing building safety problems in Wales seriously, and I wrote to him to express my strong concerns about this approach.

We have subsequently received a letter from Michael Gove, providing renewed assurances of collaborative working.

In the interests of Welsh homeowners, leaseholders and tenants, I will continue to press the UK government for the following:

1. A change in the pledge letters with developers and in the resulting detailed legal agreements from "with no prejudice to other nations" to a matching and proportionate commitment to self-remediate across the United Kingdom.
2. UK Government redoubles its efforts to introduce this year a credible, affordable and UK-wide Professional Indemnity Insurance scheme, and commissions work to support the creation of a companion insurance scheme for certification of remedial works which includes relevant aspects of fire safety.
3. Our officials to be engaged directly with developers and UK Finance bodies as a pragmatic approach to designing-in the needs of Devolved Governments.
4. An assurance that the Devolved Governments will receive every support in extending the introduction of the Building Safety Levy.
5. Support from Secretary of State Gove in seeking additional baseline capital and resource funding from HM Treasury over the UK Spending Review period.

You or your members may also wish to press your local Member of Parliament on this matter.

There is a lot of work going on in Wales to repair building safety issues, which your members are living with every day. And I will continue to keep you updated as this work progresses.

Yours sincerely



Julie James AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change