

Shelter

Grenfell Tower Adjournment Debate Briefing

The Grenfell Tower fire broke out at around 1am on June 14th 2017. So far 79 people have died or been declared missing presumed dead. Many survivors have lost loved ones. All residents have lost their home.

Shelter's immediate priority is ensuring the survivors of the Grenfell fire are permanently rehoused - in the local area, in the same tenancy. We welcome the government's commitment to this and are working locally and nationally to ensure it is delivered on. Beyond this, an unrelenting focus must be placed on understanding everything that contributed to this incident and how it was allowed to happen, in order to ensure nothing like it ever happens again.

Shelter's work in Kensington and Chelsea

Shelter services help millions of people every year through our advice line, online and face-to-face services.

We are working on the ground to help survivors of the Grenfell fire, offering free legal support and advice. Our staff are helping residents with the immediate impact of the fire, while our legal team are liaising with authorities to ensure residents' legal rights to be rehoused – both in the short term and long term - are properly fulfilled.

Our service is based at North Kensington Law Centre. As well as having face-to-face advisers on the ground we have also extended the opening hours of our London helpline to make sure we are available for those who want to speak with us. This is currently open 8am – 8pm weekdays and 8am-5pm weekends and can be reached on 0344 515 1540 – it is also open to residents who have been evacuated by local authorities on safety grounds. Members of Parliament with constituents affected by the fire or any subsequent evacuations should feel free to refer them to Shelter either through the helpline or through the contact details at the bottom of this brief.

The immediate response: questions that need to be answered

We are aware of several unanswered questions from survivors about their immediate and longer term housing. It would be very helpful if central government or local authorities leading on the response could,

if possible, provide answers to these in order that we and others are able to allay fears and ensure rehousing is expedited as quickly as possible:

1. Will the government ensure necessary funding is made available to ensure that long-term temporary accommodation within the borough can be provided immediately for residents who have lost their homes? Grenfell residents are being kept in emergency accommodation but it's currently unclear how long TA will be available for.
2. What is the government's timeline to rehouse all displaced Grenfell survivors from temporary accommodation, into long-term, stable homes with similar rates of rent within locality?
3. Will tenants with secure long-term council tenancies be rehoused with similar length tenancies?
4. Some survivors who are concerned about their immigration status are currently too afraid to seek housing support. Can it be confirmed that no immigration checks will take place and/or there will be an amnesty for undocumented migrants?
5. Will the residents of Grenfell Tower be properly represented at the Public Inquiry? Given the concerns they raised over numerous years – that appear to have been ignored – it is vital that their voices are properly heard.

The long term response

It's imperative that a public inquiry is established with the scope to identify every factor which contributed to the fire at Grenfell Tower.

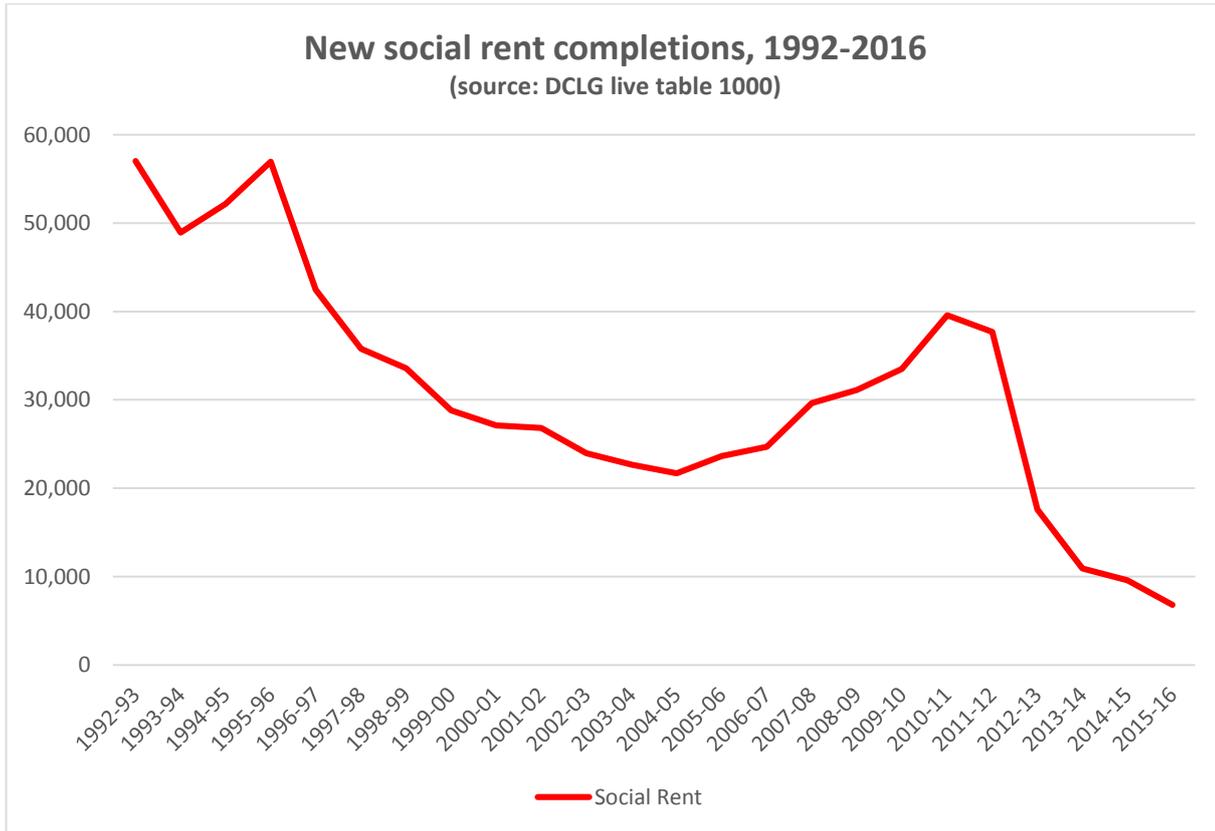
The number one regulatory question to be addressed is whether, subsequent to its recent refurbishment, Grenfell Tower complied with fire safety regulations. If not, why not? If so, why were the regulations so drawn as to allow this kind of incident to occur?

Beyond that, it's important to view Grenfell in the wider context of a national crisis in housing and homelessness – one that has grown up over a generation. In particular, the issue of where those on low incomes has for too long been considered a second order priority.

- There are now 75,740 homeless households currently living in temporary accommodation, including 119,000 children. Prior to the fire at Grenfell, there were 1,844 homeless households in temporary accommodation in Kensington and Chelsea alone.
- The under-supply of good quality council and social rent homes has become severe. Last year 6,800 social rented homes were built – 75,000 a year are now needed to keep up with demand. The decline in social rented homes started in the early 1990s and has continued under successive governments, but in recent years has been accelerated by the removal of all funding for new social rent in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review.

- 20% of homes do not meet the government's Decent Homes Standard. This includes 30% of private rented sector accommodation, 15% of social rented accommodation and 20% owner occupied accommodation. The Decent Homes Standard is defined as a home meeting minimum safety standards – including fire safety – and an absence of conditions such as mould, damp or dangerous electrics.

This has shaped the wider picture in which Grenfell has taken place and will make re-housing affected residents challenging.



Further information or help

If you require any further information, or require assistance with any Grenfell related casework, please contact Steve Akehurst steve_akehurst@shelter.org.uk / 0344 515 1170 / 07939696839.