

Parliamentary Debate: Grenfell Tower Fire Inquiry

Summary:

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness – and we campaign to prevent it in the first place. We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Shelter advisors have been working on the ground to help survivors of the Grenfell fire, offering free legal support and housing 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.

Shelter's priority is to ensure that residents are given assurances about re-housing and that they are meaningfully involved in the inquiry. Our staff have heard first-hand from tenants about the lack of trust that currently exists within the local community. It is imperative that the government does everything it can to gain trust in the inquiry process. Government must take urgent action to residents' involvement in setting the scope of the inquiry, but crucially also on broader issues around rehousing and immigration status.

Shelter's view of the scope of the inquiry

It's imperative that a public inquiry is established with the scope to establish 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?

Shelter recommends that the inquiry should cover four areas:

1. The cause of the fire
2. What allowed it to spread so fiercely?
3. Was the council's response adequate?
4. How could it, or other incidents be prevented?

Shelter will be able to provide evidence to inform whether the council's response was adequate. We extended our advice line following the fire and had advisers on the ground from the first Monday after the disaster.

The prevention question must not be slimmed down and full investigation is necessary to ensure a fire on this scale can never happen again. Further the inquiry must address the lack of community trust which has hampered rehousing efforts.

The inquiry should address:

- What the gaps are in current legislation, including:
 - Part B of the building regulations;

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- Housing Health and Safety Rating System;
- Legal Aid;
- Disrepair under housing legislation.
- Did management of the block adequately represent tenants' concerns? What action was taken in response to concerns? Did tenants feel ignored and if so why?
- Were adequate funds available for the regeneration and refurbishment of the tower?

Shelter's calls for immediate actions from the government

In order for the inquiry to be effective and for residents of Grenfell Tower to have faith in the process, the government **must take immediate steps** to reassure them and build trust in the community. In order to do this, Shelter is calling on the government to:

1. Ensure that all residents of Grenfell Tower are permanently rehoused in-borough

We have been reassured by statements from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government that all residents will be given a social home in the local area. However, there is still a lack of clarity around the government's timeline to rehouse all displaced Grenfell survivors into these long-term, stable homes. More information is needed about the current number of social homes available, when families can expect to move in to these homes and the government's plan for identifying the additional, necessary social housing.

The government must also ensure that the taskforce does not rush residents in to making decisions about Temporary Accommodation (TA) offers, that it provides TA that is suitable and meets people's needs, and that it focuses on suitable permanent rehousing. It must remain mindful of the fact that people are still grieving and confused. They want a new home, not uncertainty, or the prospect of moving multiple times.

2. Grant 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' (ILR) to all survivors who do not currently have a stable immigration status

We know through our work supporting survivors that trust is still a key barrier both to residents coming forward with information and to receive the help and support they desperately need. Some people are choosing to sleep rough rather than access support and be identified.

Because some Grenfell survivors are too fearful to come forward this is creating further complications for emergency services to find remaining survivors. Further, it is leaving families and friends in persisting anguish about their loved ones.

While the government's recent announcement to grant a 12-month 'temporary leave to remain' was a step in the right direction, it unfortunately does not go far enough. It does not do enough to reassure people about their future beyond the 12-month period and has been interpreted by some as a trap to collect personal data in order to aid immigration control in the future.

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Given that these are exceptional circumstances, granting ILR to anyone without stable immigration status is the only way that residents will feel safe enough to come forward with information that may aid the inquiry, to access the help and support they desperately need and to build trust in the government and the inquiry amongst the wider community.

3. Ensure the scope of the inquiry is broad enough to reflect resident's concerns

Given that the concerns raised by tenants over numerous years appear to have been ignored, it is paramount that their voices are properly heard throughout the inquiry process. As mentioned above, the inquiry must look at whether tenant's concerns were actually heard and meaningfully addressed.

It is clear that the community has concerns with the appointment of Sir Martin Moore-Bick as chair of the inquiry. We recommend that meetings facilitated by people acceptable to community groups are used to gather evidence and that these should be fed-in directly to the judge, in order to help address these concerns.

It will not be acceptable to expect residents to rely on written submissions only and residents have clearly stated that the current timeline for submissions is nowhere near sufficient and must be extended.

Further information on Shelter's work in Kensington & Chelsea

Our service is based at North Kensington Law Centre Westway, the Latymer Road Community Centre, the Tabernacle, and Midaye – the Somali development network. 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. We extended our helpline opening hours for the first three weeks after the disaster - our telephone advisors can be reached on 0344 515 1540. The helpline and our on-site advice services are 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.

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 / 07939 696839.