



Assembly Members

16 January 2018

Dear Assembly Member,

As Minister for Housing and Regeneration, I have assumed responsibility for coordinating the Welsh Government's actions in respect of resident safety in the aftermath of the fire at Grenfell Tower. In that capacity, I felt it timely to provide colleagues with an update on the situation in Wales, as at the end of last year.

### **Social Housing and Wider Public Estate**

When the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Carl Sargeant, updated colleagues in September he reported that our initial focus had been on identifying high-rise residential buildings, comprising seven-storeys or more, or over 18-metres in height, with any configuration of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding. The situation remains that, having identified all in-scope buildings and worked with owners/landlords to ascertain any cladding used, we have three buildings with ACM cladding systems corresponding with Building Research Establishment (BRE) large-scale test 'fails'. A further four buildings were identified at the initial screening test stage, but were later shown to have ACM/insulation systems which corresponded to large-scale tests which met Building Regulation requirements.

My officials, and the relevant Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), are in close contact with the landlord of the three buildings, Newport City Homes. Additional precautionary measures are in place in line with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and FRS advice. In addition, we are informed that work is currently underway to fit automated sprinkler systems. Remedial work to bring the cladding into line with Building Regulations is being scoped.

I am also aware that, regardless of the cladding system meeting Building Regulation requirements, the City and County of Swansea has made the decision to fit automated sprinkler systems in its high rise residential buildings.

Based on DCLG criteria, healthcare facilities would have had to be tested where ACM was present if the building was two storeys or more with overnight accommodation or 18 metres and above. No buildings across the NHS Wales estate met the relevant criteria and needed to be tested. Private hospitals were also contacted on the basis of the same DCLG criteria and no problems were identified.

### **Private Sector**

My officials have continued to work with the Welsh Local Government Association, local authorities and fire and rescue services to identify the location and owners of high-rise residential buildings, including student accommodation, in the private sector. In excess of 100 in-scope premises have been identified and officials are in contact with the owners/managing agents of all the buildings to obtain details of cladding systems in place and ensure screening of any ACM products.

In September, Carl Sargeant reported that eight of these buildings had been identified as having ACM cladding systems that do not meet Building Regulation requirements. Since then, a further three buildings have been identified. The 11 buildings are all in Cardiff. I have asked my officials to take the same approach to working with owners of private sector buildings as with social housing landlords – resident safety is our primary concern here. Officials are working with the building owners, local housing authority and fire and rescue services to monitor that additional precautionary measures are in place in line with DCLG and FRS advice. Officials will remain engaged until such time as necessary remedial work to bring the buildings into line with Building Regulations is complete.

### **Further Guidance**

The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently issued a further information note for landlords and building owners of tall residential buildings with ACM cladding:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/information-note-for-landlords-and-building-owners-of-tall-residential-buildings-with-acm-cladding>

Three further advice notes were also published.

Advice Note 13 - Advice for building owners: External Wall Insulation (EWI) systems with a render or brick-slip finish:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-building-owners-external-wall-insulation-ewi-systems-with-a-render-or-brick-slip-finish>

Advice Note 14 - Advice for building owners: external wall systems that do not incorporate ACM:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-building-owners-external-wall-systems-that-do-not-incorporate-acm> and

Advice Note 15 - Advice for building owners on external wall systems

## **Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety**

The Welsh Government welcomes Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-building-regulations-and-fire-safety-interim-report>], which recognises that fundamental, whole-system rethinking is needed to ensure resident safety and rebuild trust. While we await the final recommendations, it is clear the issues relating to the fitness of the current regulatory system and the culture within the industry are so fundamental that they cannot be addressed piecemeal. We will continue to work with UK Government, across the Welsh Government and with our stakeholders to ensure the system in Wales provides for the well-being and safety of residents.

Building on earlier discussion between Dame Judith and Welsh Ministers, we will continue to ensure views from Wales are fed into the second phase of her work. Two roundtable events with Dame Judith and her review team will be held in Cardiff on 15<sup>th</sup> January. These will include a broad range of stakeholders, including regulatory bodies, developers, housing and resident representatives. The events will provide a timely opportunity be able to feedback to Dame Judith on her interim recommendations.

### **Other high-rise buildings**


Dame Judith's interim report recognised the complexity of high rise construction projects. Welsh Government officials have been working with the Fire and Rescue Services to gain a clearer picture, particularly in respect of high-rise hotel buildings. The FRS has been proactive in identifying hotels and are in the process of completing fire inspections. We are aware of one hotel which is currently replacing cladding.

### **Fire Safety Advisory Group**

I welcome the Group's ongoing consideration of fire safety-related matters and its close links to the UK Expert Panel. I expect further recommendations in January. Once these are received, I will write again to Assembly Members with the Welsh Government's response, both to the Group's initial position statement and its final recommendations.

I will continue to provide Members with updates as and when appropriate.

Yours sincerely,



**Rebecca Evans AC/AM**  
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio  
Minister for Housing and Regeneration