

# Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

## Oral evidence: Grenfell and building safety, HC 780

Tuesday 18 March 2025

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### [Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Florence Eshalomi (Chair); Lewis Cocking; Chris Curtis; Mr Lee Dillon; Mr Will Forster; Naushabah Khan; Mr Gagan Mohindra; Joe Powell; Sarah Smith.

Questions 1 - 35

### Witnesses

**I:** Edward Daffarn, Survivor and Spokesperson, Grenfell United; Deborah Coles, Executive Director, INQUEST; Peter Apps, Journalist and author, Show Me the Bodies; Karim Khalloufi, Bereaved family member and spokesperson, The Grenfell Next of Kin.

**II:** Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith, Deputy Leader, Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council; Andy Roe, Commissioner, London Fire Brigade; Philip White, Director of Building Safety, Building Safety Regulator; Dr Lorna Stimpson, Chief Executive, Local Authority Building Control.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Edward Daffarn, Deborah Coles, Peter Apps and Karim Khalloufi.

Q1 **Chair:** This morning, we will hear from witnesses and experts from Grenfell United following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire back in June 2017. We remember the 72 people who tragically lost their lives. I am going to ask my Committee colleagues to please introduce themselves.

**Chris Curtis:** I am the Labour MP for Milton Keynes North.

**Sarah Smith:** I am the MP in Hyndburn.

**Naushabah Khan:** I am the Labour MP for Gillingham and Rainham.

**Joe Powell:** I am the MP for Kensington and Bayswater.

**Mr Forster:** I am the MP for Woking.



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**Mr Dillon:** I am the MP for Newbury.

**Lewis Cocking:** I am the MP for Broxbourne and a Hertfordshire county councillor.

**Mr Mohindra:** I am the MP for South West Hertfordshire.

**Karim Khalloufi:** I am an immediate family member of the deceased.

**Deborah Coles:** I am the executive director of INQUEST.

**Peter Apps:** I am the contributing editor at Inside Housing.

**Edward Daffarn:** I am a committee member of Grenfell United.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you for coming. The Committee is holding two separate sessions looking at the Government's response to Grenfell to really scrutinise the back of the Phase 2 report inquiry. We all know that following the tower fire back in 2017, the then Government ordered a public inquiry, which started on 14 September 2017 and concluded on 4 September 2024.

The new Government responded to the inquiry earlier this year and published their response on 26 February 2025. There are 58 recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. This morning's session is looking at some recommendations and some issues that happened afterwards, and it is a key opportunity to hear directly from survivors. If anyone feels that they need to pause or stop at any time, please let me know, but I hope that this meeting will be respectful and that we will be able to probe into some of the issues.

As Chair, I just want to start in terms of looking at the Government's response to the inquiry in Phase 2. I will ask an open question to the four guests: how do you feel about the Government's response, and are you satisfied with the overall response from the Government to date? Edward.

**Edward Daffarn:** We had to wait over seven years for Sir Martin Moore-Bick to publish his recommendations from Phase 2 of the public inquiry. We are sitting here today two months away from eight years after Grenfell.

We were generally happy with the recommendations made by Sir Martin Moore-Bick; he missed out on some recommendations that could have been made about tenants, their rights and voices, but we were generally happy with the recommendations that came before the Labour Government. At the essence of it, he found that greed and profit were put before the health and safety of our citizens. The recommendations he made were largely focused on making sure that did not happen in the future.

Recommendation one—around a single construction regulator—is very much an acknowledgement that things that were allowed to fester among private businesses need to be brought back in-house and monitored



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much more closely by the Government. If I may, I am going to say something about that particular regulation in a second.

Our overall feeling is that there is just such a lack of urgency, a lack of accountability and a lack of a clear timeline about how these recommendations are going to be implemented. We had to wait six months for the Government to respond to the regulations. It was six wasted months, because they have basically just said that so many of the recommendations require further consultation and review.

One example is the Government's decision to investigate seven of the companies involved with Grenfell, including, I think, Arconic, Kingspan and Celotex—companies at the heart of what happened to us, private companies committing, or seeming to commit, fraud on the market and allowing these very dangerous products, which should have been nowhere near buildings over 18 metres, to be put on these buildings, and obviously that is what ended up helping cause Grenfell.

In the six months that the Government took to respond, nothing was done to investigate these companies. Now, six months later, we are told that an investigation of these companies is going to take place. I use that as evidence of the delay and lack of focus and urgency. The main point I would like to make would be about the delay and lack of focus.

**Peter Apps:** My view is there are two separate questions: did the inquiry go far enough in its recommendations, and did the Government respond fully to the recommendations that were put before it?

Like Ed, there were some areas where I thought there were positive steps forward in what the Government said last month. A genuinely powerful, properly resourced construction regulator with the powers that the inquiry has recommended could be transformative. There has been a lot of talk about competency and improving competency in the construction industry, but for me, one of the things that is lacking is accountability. There is no one with the teeth to force people who do not want to play by the rules to do so. A body capable of doing that would make a big difference.

However, a very disappointing element was that one of the powers that the inquiry recommended for the new regulator to take on would be the testing and certification of construction products. The failures on testing and certification and the privatised bodies that were involved in doing that go right to the heart of what the Phase 2 inquiry report was discovering, essentially.

The conflict of interests that they had dealing with clients who they were also effectively regulating or certifying and the client-style relationship that developed as a result is the reason why these dangerous products ended up on the market. You should have had more transparency and openness and a tougher relationship between those manufacturers and the organisations that were responsible for checking whether their



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products were safe. You did not, and to leave that in private hands, which is what the Government are now suggesting, fails to get to the heart of what the inquiry has recommended. There are other things I could say, but that is probably my biggest disappointment.

**Q3 Chair:** Karim, I wanted to come to you just in terms of everything that you have heard and what the Government have been saying. Do you feel that the Government have responded in an adequate manner?

**Karim Khalloufi:** I thank the Select Committee for the invitation. I am not so experienced in explaining such things because I am not a native, so I hope you will give me time to explain.

I am happy to hear that the Government have accepted all the recommendations; it is something that satisfies the immediate family members, because this is a legacy—this is a positive legacy that our loved ones left us in order to protect future generations and British citizens.

What is very important now is implementing these recommendations and following up on the details in particular. We have had a bad experience in the Grenfell Tower fire. We don't want to hear it again and see another tragedy, sacrificing other people. I am sure that the Government will take care of this, paying particular attention to all the suppliers of these kinds of panels and making them respect the rules, not putting the money first but the security issues, because this is more important than money. This is a bad experience. This is a good legacy for the future, and it is good to pay attention to make sure there is never a repeat.

If you would give me the opportunity to speak about the inquiry itself, it is good that all these recommendations came out, but there were a lot of points missing. The most important thing that was missed is the people who were at the heart of this tragedy. I noticed that we are all speaking about technical issues, but we are forgetting the people, and the experience of the people. When I am speaking about people, I am speaking about race also: 85% of the people who died were black and brown people. The immediate families of these people didn't have a lot of say in the inquiry. This is what I want to say, and I will explain why during this session.

**Q4 Chair:** Deborah, obviously, from INQUEST's perspective, the inquest is still open pending a police investigation. How do you feel about the Government's response to the recommendations from the inquiry so far?

**Deborah Coles:** Just following on from what Karim said about protecting future generations and ensuring that the legacy of Grenfell is that it does not happen again, I have to say I am bitterly disappointed in the fact that the Government have not set up a national oversight mechanism, which would be an opportunity to carefully monitor and follow up on every single recommendation to make sure that it is implemented.



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It is very clear that the bereaved and survivors want meaningful, structural change to happen, and the Government response repeatedly referenced the need for better oversight, accountability and transparency, yet the need for a more robust system to scrutinise the implementation of report recommendations, they only accepted in principle. That is a real betrayal because the fact is that we are here because an inquest recommendation that followed Lakanal House was treated with utter contempt.

We cannot have this Government abdicate the responsibility for ensuring that these recommendations are actually implemented. Without oversight of each recommendation, there is a danger that the fragmentation we have seen during the Grenfell Tower Inquiry is continued. Ed has just spoken about the fact that after seven years, there are effectively more consultations and more things going on; and the danger is that if there is no careful oversight, that clear and dangerous accountability gap will continue.

**Q5 Joe Powell:** Just to build on that, I open this question to everybody. As you said, the recommendation was accepted in principle, and the Government have said they will publish on gov.uk all recommendations since 2024. Do you think that is sufficient in terms of that transparency and accountability for implementation that you talked about? Deborah, maybe you can start.

**Deborah Coles:** No. First, it excludes pre-2024 recommendations, which risks failing to identify those patterns of repeated recommendations that we see. But importantly, it does not draw together recommendations from inquests, inquiries and Select Committees in one place. That is absolutely fundamental. I would have very much hoped that this was seen as the opportunity to bring an oversight mechanism into force because we see that repetition of issues raised. This is not just about public inquiries; it is also about inquests into individual deaths where questions of fire safety are also raised.

**Peter Apps:** One point to make in that respect is that one of my roles as a journalist is trying to keep track of whether the Government are implementing the recommendations that have come from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and other processes. It is extraordinarily hard to do that if all you have to go on is the Government's own word. If you listen to Angela Rayner's speech, you would probably come away with the impression that they were implementing the Phase 2 recommendations in full, but they are not. If you listen to the previous Government's speeches on Phase 1, you would have come away with the impression that they were implementing their recommendations in full—largely because they said they were—but they were not. In my mind, the key recommendations in that were missing.

In fact, even after Grenfell, if you had listened to the MHCLG press office, you would have probably believed that they implemented the Lakanal House coroner's inquest, because that is what they were saying. You



cannot leave it to Departments, Officials and Ministers to police themselves. That is why INQUEST and others have been calling for a separate body to do it, and the Government's proposal—as I understand it—is to effectively report to us themselves on the progress, and that relies on them telling the truth about it, which unfortunately they haven't done.

**Edward Daffarn:** I can't state how imperative it is that the Government take the national oversight mechanism seriously. Families from the infected blood scandal, covid-bereaved families, Grenfell United and Hillsborough families have been trying to work to get this Government to implement a public body that will hold findings from inquests and public inquiries to account.

We met with Angela Rayner when she was shadow Secretary of State and put the issue of a national oversight mechanism in front of her. We have been told by her repeatedly that we are pushing at an open door and this is something that is going to happen, yet when we try to actually establish a timeline for it or a piece of legislation it may be included in, we are told that it is something that is likely to happen down the track, and I am afraid that is just simply not good enough. What we need is a national oversight mechanism now. We need it to be included possibly in the Hillsborough law or another piece of upcoming legislation.

As Deborah pointed out, inquests that recommended revision of Document B and the way that fire safety is looked at were dismissed by Brian Martin in the civil service as something like, "We just have to pay attention to what the coroner has told us; we don't have to kiss her arse," and then he just ignored what she had said. We can't have that sort of treatment of our citizens, placing people in so much jeopardy.

My request is that we don't just sit back and let the Government miss this opportunity. Something that struck me is that when we look at the last Labour Government, we could look at things like Sure Start, freedom of information and the minimum wage as things that they left Government having achieved. At the very, very least, we need to have the national oversight mechanism as something that this Labour Government achieve before they leave power.

Q6 **Joe Powell:** Finally from me, before we get into some of the details, I have two specific questions on the oversight. First, there are recommendations in this inquiry for local councils and the London Fire Brigade; we will hear from them in the second panel. How would it ensure that different levels of Government and different bodies would be covered?

Secondly, some of the pushback about a national oversight mechanism is that it is somehow ceding control. Government can choose to accept or reject recommendations, but how would that work? Would Government be able to say, "We reject this recommendation," provide a justification, and then that is part of the oversight? That is where there are some





questions about who has the decision-making power.

**Deborah Coles:** To your first question, we would expect a new body to end that fragmented approach to scrutiny, which often occurs in a silo of one Government Department or organisation, when what is needed is that holistic approach. That is what is particularly important. I really take on board Pete's point that it is really, really difficult to find responses at the moment. You can try and ask parliamentary questions, but there is no central place you can go to look at tracking these recommendations.

The other point you make is that the importance of a national oversight mechanism is that there would be a responsibility on the part of the responsible organisations to respond to what action they were taking—or inaction. The way that the NOM would work is that you would then have an account of why a recommendation has been rejected and you can keep tracking that; if you see the same issue happening again, you can then go back. It would be an open, transparent body that would also be accountable to Parliament, which is really important.

Q7 **Sarah Smith:** Moving on to discuss in a bit more detail the Phase 2 recommendations for Kensington and Chelsea London Borough Council. Does the panel think that the implementation of those recommendations on resilience would ensure that if there was a future disaster on the sort of scale that we saw in Grenfell, there would be a better, more effective response by a local council and other Category 1 responders?

**Edward Daffarn:** My feeling about RBKC is that that is one area of their practice that they have genuinely improved. We challenged the council to flip-flop from being one of the worst councils in the country in the way that they treated their residents into being one of the most progressive and best councils. If we asked them to evidence how they have done that, the thing that they can probably evidence most strongly is the way that they have got their resilience and emergency plans up to speed. What concerns me is how other councils up and down the country have responded and, going back to my original points, the lack of accountability and lack of scrutiny of those councils. We cannot afford to wait until another disaster happens to find out whether another local authority has actually implemented and taken on board these recommendations. There needs to be some monitoring force that is out there, looking at these local authorities.

I would also like to point out housing associations, which very often in the first case are responsible for responding to housing emergencies. We saw in the fire in Wembley a year ago that it was a local housing association that first took responsibility for responding to the fire, and I think they kind of did not respond in a really satisfactory way. So we need to look also at the difference between local authorities being monitored, or not as the case may be; local housing associations certainly aren't.

**Peter Apps:** Resilience and recovery are not areas of particular expertise for me, but one of the recommendations that the inquiry made was that



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local authorities should work to have appropriate housing for people displaced by disasters, taking into account personal, ethnic and cultural requirements. I have reported on a lot of instances over the last few years—not just Grenfell—where people have had to be suddenly moved out of a home because of a fire, or because the home has just been discovered to be unsafe, and the rehousing element of that is always the most traumatic. It is always poorly handled, and a lot of that comes down to a lack of available appropriate housing.

So, I was encouraged by that recommendation in the report. I was discouraged by central Government's response to merely write to local authority chief executives and remind them of their responsibilities. I think climate change will push up the number of disasters where people are displaced, and we need a strategy for how we compassionately and appropriately rehouse people when that happens. At Grenfell, that certainly was not in place.

**Karim Khalloufi:** My answer is not going to be very technical because I am an immediate family member of the deceased living outside this country, but I am concerned directly with what happened. I want to say to RBKC that I noticed after the inquiry the same staff—maybe this was missed by the inquiry—the same people who were responsible for this disaster, because RBKC was among the people who contributed to this accident because of negligence. People were not changed. The manner in which they were managing did not change.

From my point of view, it is very important that the architecture of those responsible for this tragedy and the architecture of RBKC must be changed, in order to answer the needs of the people. The safety issues—what happened—are concerned directly with RBKC, with the Tenant Management Organisation. It is very important that the Government and all the officials take this into consideration, because it is a problem of human making—it is a problem of competency and negligence and accountability. The problem of what happened is that people neglected major things about safety and security, and this is what led to the fire, what led to this tragedy, which was very avoidable.

If you would give me this opportunity, I am here to express what the immediate families of the deceased feel. Technical stuff and technical problems are not my problem; they are the problem of others. I am here just to tell you what the immediate families of the deceased expressed, and The Grenfell Next of Kin who have been fighting for this.

I want to take this opportunity before the Committee. Excuse me, but I have to say this. When the inquiry was called by Prime Minister Theresa May, we didn't know— The decision to have the inquiry was taken 24 hours after the disaster. We didn't know who was alive and who was dead. We didn't even know what an inquiry was. This decision hurt us, so we are now counting on you as the Select Committee to give us some answers, which is very, very important from our point of view. The first





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question is: why did Theresa May take this decision in a hurried, speedy way? Why? Why didn't she think of the consequences?

Today, our justice is denied and delayed because of this speedy process without thinking. She made this decision, but did she think of the consequences? Did she think about how we would get justice? What is important for us—the immediate family of the deceased—is justice. What comes out as a recommendation is very good and very important for British citizens and the coming generations. The inquiry was made in order to give us justice. But on the opposite, all the family members of the deceased noticed that instead of solving the problems, the inquiry becomes part of the problem, because we are here now just waiting for the answer for justice. RBKC, the companies, the TMO, they are responsible. They must be accountable. You as officials, you are responsible for avoiding future catastrophes or tragedies in order to save the people.

**Chair:** You have rightly raised an important point, and one thing that the inquiry will help to do is outline the responsibility. Separate from that is the police investigation, which I know that many families continue to push for in terms of accountability and justice. These are key questions that we will continue to ask the Government. We have a session in April with the Minister with responsibility, and we will take those questions directly to him.

Q8 **Sarah Smith:** Guidance is due to be published on identifying and supporting vulnerable people. Before we move on, I was interested to know whether there is anything specific that you want to see in that guidance coming forward from the Government.

**Peter Apps:** That is probably not my area of expertise.

**Chair:** Thank you. I will move on.

Q9 **Naushabah Khan:** I want to move on to fire safety and services. How confident are you that the changes to how Fire and Rescue Services operate—in relation to high-rise fires particularly—will prevent another disaster like Grenfell from happening? Are there any recommendations for the Fire and Rescue Services in particular that you want to see prioritised?

**Edward Daffarn:** I would like to answer in a very general way. Going back to my earlier point about the lack of timelines, lack of commitment, lack of scrutiny and enforcement, I made a list of some recommendations that are related to the fire service. The first one is around community centres. For us, the most important thing after Grenfell was how important places like the ClementJames Centre, the Harrow Club and the Latymer Christian Centre were in responding to the disaster and how intrinsic those community centres are to a disaster happening and a proper response being done.



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There was a recommendation in the report—I think it was recommendation 13—that pointed out that importance. But when you actually look at the recommendations and the Government response, recommendations 13, 26, 27, 39, 40, 41 and 51 all pertain to fire service or community response, and all lack what we consider appropriate timelines and proper monitoring of enforcement. That is the major point I would like to make. I know I have made it slightly obtusely, but it gets back to that lack of urgency—the failure to ask, “What is going to happen? How long is it going to take? What is the outcome going to be? How are we going to keep people safe?” That is what is really important to us, and that is what is lacking in some of the Government responses to these recommendations.

**Peter Apps:** I am obviously not an expert in any sense in operational firefighting and I am not going to try and comment on that. But particularly from the Phase 1 report, you had a very central conclusion: what are fire services—not just the London Fire Brigade but all fire authorities—supposed to do if there is a sudden, unexpected and total loss of compartmentation in a building and they need to evacuate it?

Part of answering that question in a way that takes into account the needs of residents with disabilities—obviously a very important part of the Grenfell Tower story—involves action from the Government. Fire services and firefighters on the ground need a way to raise the alarm quickly. At the moment, they don’t have that because purpose-built blocks of flats with a stay-put strategy don’t have block-wide alarm systems. Residents with disabilities need a way out of the building.

At the moment, the Government are going to be reliant on that information being available to the fire services, which will then affect rescues. It will be a good question for the next panel: how confident are they if they come to a building with a very large number of trapped disabled residents, and how easy or possible would it be for crews to get to those people and get them out of the building in time? If you don’t have a practical means of raising the alarm and you don’t have a practical means of getting the vulnerable residents out of the building safely or them escaping under their own steam, all the policies and procedures that the fire brigade put in place might fail because those are fundamental problems with a building, which they cannot fix once a fire breaks out.

If you look through the report’s conclusions on the London Fire Brigade, there was a very serious failure within the London Fire Brigade to implement the findings of the Lakanal House coroner’s inquest, to properly train their front line to deal with what, after Lakanal, was a foreseeable event of external compartmentation loss. I would be interested in how the scrutiny of this now reform of the London Fire Brigade is going to take place, because that was a failure before Grenfell.



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**Deborah Coles:** I have a very short response. Your questioning further reiterates why we need to have proper oversight and very careful monitoring, following up and timelines in terms of implementation of recommendations. The recommendations around PEEPs—Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans—are a good example because that was recommended in the Phase 1 report in 2019 and repeated in the Phase 2 report. The Government announced the residential PEEPs, and now they have said that there will be secondary legislation. So, in a way, the question remains: what happens when commitments are made but are still not put into action?

**Karim Khalloufi:** These technical areas are not for us to comment on, but from our perspective, there is a huge disappointment in the constant hero-worshipping of firefighters. At the time of the fire, there were 269 occupants of the tower. 168 exited in the first 20 minutes. Of the other 101 people, 72 died. The fire brigade failed. For over two hours, they told 101 people to stay put, and 72 lost their lives. For me, my family and most of the next of kin families I am representing here today, the issue of the fire brigade's negligence is central. The death of our loved ones was violent, horrific and the very worst nightmare. We still have to deal with unidentified human remains. We received a letter sent by the Metropolitan Police. You cannot imagine the horror of this situation and the daily triggers and reminders, yet we have to soldier on. This is a club that no single one of us wants to be a member of, nor would we wish it on anyone else. The least this Government, the council and anyone who claims to support us in this disaster can and should do is to stop hero-worshipping the fire brigade.

Their intrusion into the anniversary event has meant that most of us do not attend. The official narrative is "brave firefighters". For those of us who were on the phone to our families, or listened to the 999 calls, and heard the evidence in Phase 1 of the inquiry, it is particularly difficult to hear Ministers and MPs stand up to praise the firefighters without taking the trouble of knowing all the facts as we do. Because it is us that were on the phone to our kin, and us that listened to the 999 calls where our loved ones said, "You told us to stay put—that you were coming for us—and now it is too late; we are dying."

So next time this Government or any Government want to praise the fire brigade, please bear in mind we have issues with their negligence, and want to see them in court—not on a stage or in a movie being hero-worshipped. Consider the facts—all the facts. We recognise that some of the survivors may be thankful to individual firefighters, but this is about those who died, and for that reason, we would hope there will be consideration for us who need to see justice, and that includes the fire brigade. Thank you.

**Chair:** We recognise the facts about some of the information on the night and what the families had to go through, and we remember the 72 people who died. But we do also remember that every day, firefighters



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continue to put their lives in danger going into fires. Where there are faults from the fire brigade, that should be investigated properly, and following Grenfell, the London Fire Brigade was brought under special measures, and that comes under the Mayor of London's jurisdiction.

I know that that is an area that is scrutinised, but I think it is fair to recognise firefighters up and down the country—not just in London—who, day in and day out, go into houses where there are blazes to save people. I am not saying there are not thoughts on what happened that night, but I just wanted to put that on record in terms of the firefighters.

**Q10 Mr Dillon:** I have a question for Ed and Karim around community engagement, if that is okay. The Deputy Prime Minister said on 7 February that the tower would start coming down to ground level. In your view, how could the Government improve their engagement with the community over decisions that are made on the future of the site?

**Karim Khalloufi:** As I responded to an earlier question, I am not against dismantling the tower. I am not against dismantling the tower because whenever I go there and whenever I go there with other families, it is something that is very hurtful to see. Instead I prefer, and they would prefer to see something nice, especially for the people who are living around it—for the children. This is something which hurts them every day. So I am encouraging the Government to dismantle the tower, even if it is something which is very upsetting for us because it is the houses of our loved ones, but we have to think about the future. We have to be very rational.

This brings me to think about the Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission. To give a brief history, the Memorial Commission was set up between 2018 and 2019 by the Government at that time. I am not criticising, but I am sharing my point of view. I was never happy with the commission—the way it was elected and set up. I remember we did a petition just to express our disagreement. The petition represented half of the people who are dead, 32 people, and they didn't consider the petition. Why am I saying that? Because I have seen no positive results coming from the Memorial Commission. To tell you the truth, they don't know me. I am an immediate family member of the deceased, but they don't know me. They know no one, and not one of the families of the deceased wants to be there.

Secondly, their policy. Today, we do not have the right to be present in the Memorial Commission. There are five people "representing" us, but I don't feel that they are representing me because no one can represent anyone. What I feel towards my sisters is maybe different from what my mum feels for my sisters. It is different. As I said in the meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, at least it should be re-elected in order to answer to the needs of people because, in the end, this commission wouldn't have existed if our loved ones had not perished.



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So this commission is mainly—I am not saying 100%, but mainly—for the people who lost their loved ones. At least if they cannot be present, they can be observers. So the way that the Memorial Commission is managed is not fair; they are just imposing new ideas. Even at the engagement events they hold, none of The Grenfell Next of Kin or the immediate families are present. Through this Memorial Commission, we want something that brings peace to people, not hate or hostility. So far, this commission has not answered our needs.

**Q11 Mr Dillon:** One of my follow-up questions is on the commission. How closely do you think it has stuck to the principles that were signed up by Sajid Javid?

**Edward Daffarn:** Can I first discuss Angela Rayner and the decision around the tower? Grenfell United met with Angela Rayner in one of her lead-ups to making the decision; it was getting towards the end of January. The one thing that we specifically asked her to do was to reach out to difficult-to-engage bereaved family members because we felt that it was so important that those people were listened to. There was a mechanism for doing it: a dedicated service that is run by the Council and is often used by different agencies to reach out to people.

Angela and the Department failed to do that, and that was what was really disappointing to us. They wrote letters to people and invited people to attend generic meetings, but they didn't do what we had specifically asked them, which was to use the mechanisms available to reach out and speak to bereaved family members.

**Q12 Mr Dillon:** Did they commit to doing that in advance?

**Edward Daffarn:** We asked Angela, but you will probably have to ask her whether she committed to it or not. The second part is that we said, "When you make your decision, come and tell us with statistics how many bereaved family members you spoke to." So it was our expectation that that was something that she would do. We can all appreciate that the decision around the tower is probably one of the most difficult decisions that she will be forced to make. If you ask six different people—bereaved family members, survivors or local community members—what they want to see for the future of the tower, you will get six different answers. There is never going to be a good time to make that decision. There will be worse times than others to make that decision, but there is never going to be a good time either. We can acknowledge that, but our disappointment came from our direct request to her to really try to reach out to people living abroad and to bereaved family members who have not traditionally engaged with the Government or consultations. What was most disappointing was that the mechanism was there and she chose not to use it.

The second point to make is that what was most upsetting to people was the decision to pull the tower all the way down to the ground. There needed to be room for consultation about the possibility of saving some



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of the building towards ground level, whether it was just a lobby or whether it was the building to a couple of floors up. To have that decision taken away from us was upsetting. I know that the Government did not consult with the Memorial Commission before they made that decision, and that feels like a great mistake.

**Q13 Mr Dillon:** In terms of the principles, do you feel that they are being followed?

**Edward Daffarn:** I have listened to what Karim has to say. I am not a bereaved family member myself. I know that there are many extremely bereaved family members on the commission.

My own view of the commission is that we need a memorial. We need a process that can lead us to a memorial; we really do need that. That process is going to involve a lot of love, a lot of unselfishness, a lot of pragmatism, a lot of people understanding that not everyone is going to get exactly what they want. My own view is that as a community, we have to find a way of getting to that place. I support anything and any process that will get us to a place where we can have a memorial.

I am aware of 9/11 and how the memorial process went there. None of these things are easy, and they are all fraught with different feelings and emotions. My wish is that we can get to a place where we can have a memorial fitting to remember the lives of the 72 that were lost.

**Q14 Chair:** I just want to thank you all for coming before the panel this morning. We have had some really important points that will give us questions to ask directly to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister with responsibility, Alex Norris MP.

**Karim Khalloufi:** I have just one clarification. During the inquiry, Andy has pronounced the word bereaved. I have a problem with this word because "bereaved" is very inclusive; it means cousins or second cousins, and includes sisters, brothers, siblings, husband, and so on of the deceased. "Bereaved" is a very inclusive word; it can mean a lot. It can mean far cousins.

My request to you as the Select Committee is, can you please give us the data and criteria of "bereaved" for the inquiry, because for us it is a very big word. What I request—this is also the request of the immediate family members—is to know who these bereaved are. We asked for the data and the criteria, but no one has answered us.

**Q15 Chair:** So you want clarification on what "bereaved" is capturing?

**Karim Khalloufi:** And who these bereaved are.

**Chair:** That is something that we can take back in our deliberations and ask the Department to look at.

I just wanted to thank you all for coming this morning. I know it has not been easy. Peter and Deborah, thank you for the work that you have





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been doing to support the families. It is important for us, as we come to the anniversary in June, to continue to remember the 72 people who died. This is for them and for the people who survived, and it is really important that we recognise that, sadly, there are still some buildings across the country with this flammable cladding. It is around accountability and responsibility, and it is around justice for those people.

**Karim Khalloufi:** Chair, could I say something? Maybe I will not see you again.

**Chair:** You will. Please do.

**Karim Khalloufi:** We have knocked on many doors for help as immediate families of the deceased, but their doors were not opened for us. The only opportunity that we have in front of us, and we thank God for that, is a collective, which is The Grenfell Next of Kin. The Grenfell Next of Kin is a voluntary organisation that has taken it upon her shoulders to reach people who have many difficulties, especially people abroad. As I said before, 85% of the people were black and brown people. They were British citizens and most of their families are abroad. The Grenfell Next of Kin targets these people and makes a lot of effort to enable them to be in the system.

I have heard many experiences. As I am talking to you now, there is a woman in another country who has just found out where her daughter was buried and wants to come to the UK just to pray for her daughter, but she cannot; she is having a lot of difficulties. The Grenfell Next of Kin was the only organisation that knocked on the doors of the Home Office and others responsible and asked for help for people. We are really happy to have this opportunity to express that, without this organisation, maybe I would not be with you today. We have received a lot of support. We continue to have obstacles and we continue to have hostility, but we will never give up.

**Chair:** And we are going to be with you on that fight.

**Karim Khalloufi:** Thank you.

**Chair:** I know that the local MP, Joe Powell, continues to liaise with you as well.

**Karim Khalloufi:** Yes.

**Chair:** We will do what we can as a Select Committee to support you.

**Karim Khalloufi:** Thank you for listening. Thank you so much.

**Chair:** Thank you for coming this morning.

Examination of witnesses



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Witnesses: Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith, Andy Roe, Philip White and Dr Lorna Stimpson.

**Chair:** Good morning. Can I just get the witnesses to introduce themselves please? I will start at that end with Dr Lorna.

**Dr Stimpson:** I am the chief executive of LABC and have been since 2019.

**Philip White:** I am the director of building safety for the Building Safety Regulator, which is part of the Health and Safety Executive.

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** I am the deputy leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council and have been since July 2017.

**Andy Roe:** I am the London fire commissioner.

Q16 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us this morning. I am sure you have all been looking at the Government's response to the inquiry and the Phase 2 recommendations. I just wanted to start by asking how you all feel the Government's response has been and whether there is anything you feel the Government missed in their response.

**Dr Stimpson:** If I may just take a moment? Maybe other people have been quite affected by the first panel; it has certainly affected me all over again. Sorry—I am getting very emotional. I just want to express my deepest sympathies to those who have lost their loved ones and to the survivors of this awful tragedy. The last number of years must have been so painful and distressing. I am completely committed to doing the small part I can to transform the construction industry, which I have been in since I was 16. I just wanted to make that comment before we started; sorry to take that time.

What do I think of the Government's response? Going back to the inquiry's response, it was very detailed and seemed to find the right things that needed to be found. In terms of the Government's response, we will very much wait and see what happens, and that was very much picked up by the first panel.

I just want to reflect a little on what has happened over the last few years. Particularly for my profession—building control—it has been a transformative and really difficult period of time, and that is quite appropriate. If people continue to have a problem with how difficult things are and are going to be going forward, they need to sit and listen to the session we have just heard and perhaps go back to what happened in 2017. It has been difficult and is going to continue to be difficult, and quite rightly so, but I have trust in the Government and my colleagues in the civil service who I work with regularly. The culture is that they are now intent on seeing change; that is the feeling I get.

Q17 **Chair:** We heard from the first panel that if we do not have that national oversight mechanism, the Government could be marking their own



homework. We have learned what has changed in those seven wasted months, as Edward put it. You are saying that you do have faith in the Government in terms of bringing forward all the—

**Dr Stimpson:** I see what has happened over the last few years, which has been driven by the Building Safety Regulator, MHCLG colleagues and Government. I think they will transform, but it is very much the responsibility of all the actors within the construction industry to actually step forward and take on that responsibility to see that transformational change.

**Philip White:** First, I would just like to echo Lorna's comments. You cannot but be moved when listening to the evidence from the witnesses at the first panel. When things in the Building Safety Regulator get quite challenging and tough, we always remind ourselves that it is nothing compared to what the bereaved families and others suffered at Grenfell.

We welcome the Government's response; it sets out the direction of travel and acknowledges the reforms that have taken place over the last few years. The public inquiry gave a nod to the reforms but was not asked to look into them, so it is good to see that there has been explicit reference to the work of the Building Safety Regulator.

Alongside that, there is the second regulator, which does not get quite so much airtime: the National Regulator for Construction Products, which sits within the Office for Product Safety and Standards. It provides a really good opportunity to build out on the reforms that have been made, but that will be quite challenging, and we can come back to that when we talk about developing a single regulator.

It is very good that the report has referenced the role that industry has. When I talk about industry, I talk about those who develop, those who procure, those who build, those who design, those who maintain, and those who manage buildings. You can do all you like with a single regulator, but there has to be change in the way all those duty holders operate and how they manage building safety, whether through procurement or day to day on the buildings they are responsible for.

Q18 **Chair:** Do you think we will not see the change until we see criminal prosecutions? Do you feel that just having a regulator will be enough to bring that change across the sector, which is widespread?

**Philip White:** Change comes through a number of different mechanisms. Enforcement no doubt has a salutary effect on a sector, but to be fair to parts of the industry, they have stepped up and been working very closely with MHCLG, the Building Safety Regulator and others to develop guidance and standards and try to change the way things are done, but there is still a long way to go.

In the Building Safety Regulator, through our regulatory services, which are fairly young—we are still in our infancy—we still see quite serious failings in terms of the fact that we have to reject nearly 70% of building



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control applications for the Gateway 2 process, where we are the building control authority. Where nearly 40% of applications have to be invalidated before they even get assessed, it just shows that the industry cannot even get its head around providing basic paperwork.

When we have gone along to carry out assessments—we are doing our first six months of building assessments at work alongside the Fire and Rescue Services—we are seeing people struggling to understand and explain how they are managing their fire and structural safety risks in their buildings. Indeed, very recently, we issued our first refusal for a building assessment certificate on a building less than 10 years old.

The Gateway 3 process is where you have finished your building and need to effectively get approval from the Building Safety Regulator. We have been dealing with some of those over the last few weeks; one in London working with the London Fire Brigade and a local authority where a developer thought their building was ready to be occupied. There were some serious failings in relation to fire and life safety matters, and it is a building that has been put up since Grenfell.

So there are still significant challenges out there. If we are not allowing that building to be occupied and not allowing building control approval for buildings because people are not able to explain how they are going to comply with the building regulations, that is preventing unsafe designs from being built into the environment.

The industry has been doing some good work but there is a long way to go. Our experience—certainly in the Health and Safety Executive—is that when you look at a sector and need to change its culture, it is a long journey, and there are a number of different levers you have to pull to get to those changes.

**Q19 Chair:** I know the council has accepted all the recommendations from the inquiry in full and was found to be culpable before, during and after the fire. It has also adopted a duty of candour since the fire. What practical change has that made? Does it align with some responses that we have seen from the Government?

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** Can I just start by saying that we would not be sitting here if it was not for the abject failure of the council? We have always accepted that. It is very difficult to listen to people who have been battling this for 23 months and four days.

We published our response to the inquiry in November, prior to yours, and I welcomed the Government's response because we are pretty much on all fours with you in terms of where the recommendations are.

Coming here today, I got up and it was a very sunny day. It just reminded me of the day of the tragedy. I was a back-bench councillor and I saw it on television, which in itself is a big alarm bell in terms of process as far as the council is concerned. Nobody had sent me a notice



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to tell me of this event; I saw it on television. Then I went up and I could see the utter chaos that was there and the heartfelt work that was going on. It was clear that something had gone completely wrong. I spent my day carrying water and helping people get to hotels on my Uber account.

I was appointed deputy leader and the most important thing is safety, which is something I said in my public company days at our annual conference. The most important thing for a council is the safety of the residents, and that is something we failed on.

Not surprisingly, our concentration is on resilience. The issues in terms of resilience are pretty basic stuff. First, it is training and making sure people have an understanding of what that resilience is. Secondly, it is on resourcing. In fact, we have a training course going on with resilience in GU today. We have put a lot of effort into it, and I would really welcome sharing that experience with other local authorities. It is an evolving process, but we now have 200 staff, including 30 people on call 24/7, who are ensuring our residents are safe.

We have also had practical experience. Last year, we had a major fire in the borough where 150 people were displaced and two houses gutted. I got a text message to tell me about it—in stark contrast to Grenfell—so I was able to go there first-hand and we were able to get people into hotels and meeting rooms and deal with the emergency services. What came out of that for us, which is to be shared with other local authorities, is that the council, RBKC, has a lot of available accommodation. As far as other local authorities are concerned, they should be doing an audit.

On the flip side of that, reference was made to the VCS sector and the importance of the role that they play in advance. We have spent a lot of time building close relationships. Joe referred to the Almanaar last week in his speech; I am a trustee of the Almanaar. It is a fantastic organisation that stepped up on that day; that is a lesson for us all that can be shared.

To conclude, my reflection on the overall response is that I think it is good. The challenge Edward mentioned about us being a council principally of safety, which has been repeated by the Deputy Prime Minister and our MP—who is representing his residents—should be put about across all councils as an aspiration.

**Q20 Chair:** The Phase 2 report found the fire brigade had failed to ensure that regular suitable training was provided for control room handlers, looking at fire survival guidance given to residents on the day. In response to the Government's inquiry, do you feel that is a fair assessment? On the recommendations, is there anything you feel Government should have added?

**Andy Roe:** Before I answer that question, I will start where my colleagues sitting on this panel did. What I saw unfold in front of me for 12 hours that night is— I am speaking as someone who has had a very



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long operational career—30 years in the British Army and then the London Fire Brigade. I have been at the scene of many major tragedies this city has faced. I have had a career that has sadly been marked by mass fatality incidents, where I have either been in a command position or been one of the first responders on the ground.

I can say openly that, even in comparison to 7/7 and the Omar bombing—things I was present for—Grenfell is the apex of multi-institutional failure in the post-war period, because everyone from the private sector to the public sector to my own organisation was part of a profound abdication of responsibilities, and that had the most terrible outcome; because, speaking frankly, I watched the bodies of men, women and children come out of the tower, for many hours.

I always start in that place. I hear the words of Karim and Ed particularly and I hold the memory of the people they lost, whenever I provide a response. The big, uniformed institutions—whether it is us, colleagues in policing, or the military—people who have great responsibility to hold other people's personal tragedies at that moment of crisis—whoever it might be—you would do well to remember that moment, and why you are there and why you have relevancy as an organisation. You do well not to let it be forgotten in the actions you bring after.

I would argue that we have changed fundamentally. Going to another point that was made by the first panel, while no oversight mechanism actually exists yet for broad recommendations, we are of course inspected, and alongside the Metropolitan Police, the London Fire Brigade is one of the most inspected uniformed services in the country, and rightly so.

We have brought manifest change across every area that was outlined in Phase 1 of the inquiry. We are the only government agency to have actually completed all 29, and for us it was not a tick list; we can point to the evidence. Sadly, in a very high-risk operating environment, my people will be out there dealing with it now. We get two high-rise fires a day. If we point to serious fires that have happened since Grenfell—such as in the Spectrum Building in Dagenham or New Providence Wharf out towards Wapping—you can see that the changes we brought were real because, rather than, I am afraid, telling people to stay put, we evacuated immediately.

I just want to be clear; this is not an office fire drill. When you want to understand what the changes mean for the London Fire Brigade, it is total. It is a massive investment in the training of thousands of people from control to frontline firefighters and implementation of systems that pass information from the fireground back to control and back out to the fireground again.

Even with that, the margins are thin. If you talk about Dagenham, we have a leading firefighter there—a young man who called an evacuation within a minute of turning up at that incident. He had to get so close to





the building, which at the point we turned up was almost 100% alight, that his t-shirt caught fire above his fire gear. I have had a 21-year-old firefighter—who had been in the service four months—jump over an inappropriately locked security fence to carry people down off burning scaffolding. That is the reality of the practical change the London Fire Brigade has brought and the margins within which we operate when we still have so many dangerous buildings in London.

So I think we can point to change. We have been very heavily inspected. I do respect the point made by my colleague from INQUEST; that has actually been good for us—not marking our own homework, being in special measures and being held to account. Inspection is real. It is a team of 20 people who were on our patch for three months in the summer, visiting our control room, looking at what we do on live incidents, interviewing firefighters and speaking to community. We have not judged that ourselves, and we are all the better for it.

I always say being brought into that inspection regime has been the single most important lever, in many ways, to drive change. I know there is a responsibility to maintain that. I hear the point made about Lakeland; change is only good as long as it is sustained and there is proof that you have done it. To answer your question, yes we have changed. Does it give me comfort? Not really, because we should not have had 72 people lose their lives with the destruction of a community in front of us in the first place. I suppose I speak to that. The change is real, but what a sadness in London that we ever had to do it.

**Q21 Chair:** The first panel raised points in terms of the national oversight mechanism. You highlighted that the London Fire Brigade was in special measures. The Government have accepted the key recommendations—albeit some in principle—but in terms of seeing the whole-scale change that we need, do you feel that should be the next step?

**Andy Roe:** I know that colleagues in Government are heavily engaged in thinking about this. From our perspective, we would welcome a consolidated oversight mechanism of some kind because the point made about the prevention of future deaths from INQUEST is really important. Single fatalities and near misses can be precursors and red flags for something bigger. A way of capturing learning across multiple points of tragedy—both small and large—of failure in an institution would be useful. There can be a debate about how you get to it, but we would certainly welcome a place where we were held to account and could see a very clear list of where issues align.

**Q22 Joe Powell:** One follow-up question for Councillor Taylor-Smith on the Chair's question about duty of candour, because that is obviously closely aligned to the kind of change that the council leadership said they wanted to see post the fire. That includes treating members of the public and each other with mutual respect, being open to challenge, and apologising straightforwardly and genuinely when there are differences of view.



We will have a Hillsborough Law coming to Parliament soon. Can you be specific about how that has changed the council and how you are measuring it? As a new MP, I get the impression that lots of residents do not feel they are seeing that, so I just want to understand how you are actually implementing it in practice.

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** As you have referenced, we were actually the first council to adopt the Hillsborough Charter. One big issue raised by the inquiry time and time again was the feeling that residents were not being listened to. We took the housing back from TMO so that we had direct responsibility, because a lot of the issues that relate to residents' complaints of not feeling listened to surround housing. TMO came back in and we instigated all the meetings that it had cancelled because people felt there was no point going to them.

There is plenty of opportunity for residents to raise issues and concerns, and I know you have attended a number of our meetings where we have had that and enabled them to do so. I want to avoid getting into self-congratulations with, "We have done this, we have done that," for the reasons Andy articulated, but if we look at our overall satisfaction, which was less than 24% when we did it independently at the time of the fire, it is now up to 70%. That is not a cause for celebration; it might show an improvement, but 30% of people are still very unhappy. As you will know from the cases you were getting at the time, a lot relate to the refurbishment works that we are doing.

One problem we have in the council is a lack of available homes that we can give people in terms of decanting. Within our overview and scrutiny committee, we monitor what the complaints are and investigate them all. Personally, I feel a complaint is an opportunity to change and get things right, and it is something I always want to encourage from our senior officers.

Q23 **Chair:** I just want to clarify: every single person who needed to be rehoused from the Grenfell tragedy has now been rehoused. Is that correct?

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** I hesitate slightly. It is correct, but we have an issue with one bereaved survivor who has yet to move in because there are issues with his property and he has had to move out, but yes is the short answer.

Q24 **Mr Mohindra:** I am going to move on to the regulation and machinery of Government and my question is going to be addressed to Philip. Before I go into my suggested question, you spoke about culture change. As the regulator, how can you embed culture change in the industry and what other tools do you need from Government to ensure that the industry leads from the front on this?

**Philip White:** That is a good question. Something we have been developing very recently—indeed this afternoon I am going to a workshop led by Dame Judith Hackitt, who chairs the Industry Safety Steering



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Group—we have done some insight work to develop a guide to culture change. This is around people showing leadership within organisations from the very top that safety is paramount. That will be one of our guiding principles.

What sort of culture has been set in terms of learning and development within those organisations? There is a whole raft of things that we can point to and we have developed a draft guide to culture change. From our perspective, there are one or two aspects of the building safety legislation that would be helped if we had some change. For example, putting my hat on as a health and safety regulator for occupational safety and health, if I saw a problem at a building and that problem had manifested itself because the middle managers were incompetent and we wanted to get them trained up, we could serve an improvement notice in terms of getting training done.

The Building Safety Act 2022 only allows us to tackle issues building by building, so we cannot tackle the employer. Some duty holders own multiple buildings. If we find a problem at a particular building, we just deal with it there. I would like to have the power to serve a notice to say, “We found a problem here because the managers don’t have any training in relation to x or y. Here is an improvement notice for the organisation to get its workforce trained up in that way.” That is a lever to address the underlying problem that may have manifested itself in some way.

**Q25 Mr Mohindra:** In that instance, what would you do at that moment? Would you identify that individual property and put the improvement notice in? Do you have a feedback loop to Government to say, “Actually, we would like this to be an industry standard”?

**Philip White:** Yes. We have good relationships with MHCLG, which is effectively our parent Department for building safety. As you would expect with new legislation that is quite complex, there are some wrinkles, so we are informing MHCLG and saying, “There are some wrinkles here; these are things that we would like to see changed at the next opportunity.”

**Q26 Mr Mohindra:** I will bring that up in a future meeting with the relevant Minister. Going back to Government, do you agree with the Government’s assessment that having a single regulator for construction with responsibility for undertaking testing and certification of construction products would create a conflict of interest?

**Philip White:** We do not regulate products in the building safety regulations; as I have said previously, that is down to the OPSS. However, I think there is a potential conflict in terms of the regulator almost effectively marking its own homework, with one part of the organisation potentially doing the testing, certification and issuing certificates of compliance and the other looking at that in terms of how it applies to a particular building. That area needs to be regulated, no doubt about it; it is just how it should be regulated best. This is one of the



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questions that will need to be answered as the Government take forward the proposal for a single construction regulator. All those areas need to be regulated, but how is that done best through the single regulator?

**Q27 Mr Mohindra:** Finally, the Government are suggesting that the single regulator will not be in place until 2028. What are the risks of delaying the setup of the new regulator? What are they going to actually be focusing on?

**Philip White:** A lot of reform has already taken place and we should be confident that those reforms are taking place. In the first instance, you need to let those reforms bed in, both from our perspective as the Building Safety Regulator and the change that has happened to products.

The big challenge in terms of taking forward the proposals for the single regulator is that you have a Green Paper out on products at the moment. You want to take forward your proposals for the single regulator. You have also set up an independent panel to look at building control in terms of whether there should be a national service and what the role of the private sector is. There are a lot of interdependencies between those issues and how you best bring those around.

The other challenge here—even the public inquiry touched upon it—is in the Government’s response. Who is going to be advising Ministers ultimately in relation to aspects of the building regulations and associated guidance? For example, it talks about the chief construction adviser doing that and says it is the role of the Building Safety Regulator or the single regulator. The Department also has a role in terms of advising Ministers because they lead on policy. This is going to have to be thought through very carefully in terms of who is providing that hard-nosed and sharp independence.

There are other challenges on the single regulator where the Government response is quiet at one level because it is complex. It talks about a single construction regulator but is that for housing? Is it going to cover things like the building of schools, warehouses and national infrastructure?

We are doing building safety assessment certificate work on 12,500 registered buildings over the next five years. It is not construction work as they are occupied buildings, and frankly, it is probably where the risk currently lies that we need to address. Is that going to be part and parcel of the single regulator? That is where the regulatory landscape is quite complex. We have fire and housing legislation applying to that; indeed, even aspects of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 apply in certain buildings.

It is a complex landscape, but there is an opportunity here to really build on the reforms that have been created and provide clarity in the regulatory landscape to those who have to comply with the legislation. There is quite a lot for them to grapple with, and the more clarity there



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is, the easier it is to comply. It is about how we then regulate between the different authorities that are responsible.

So it is quite a challenge to create this regulatory reform prospectus that the Government response talks about, and then the legislation to do it, even over the next six to nine months. You should be assured that there are good frameworks in place under the Building Safety Act 2022. It might have a few little wrinkles. There is the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 in place as well. So the legislation is there to provide protection and allow powers for enforcement.

**Q28 Chair:** On that, do you think there could be a potential for conflict of interest? You could essentially have the same organisation carrying out the assessments and then carrying out the regulation.

**Philip White:** In some areas, there could potentially be. That is something that will need to be looked at as the work to build the single regulator goes ahead.

**Q29 Mr Forster:** Can I ask two questions? First, Philip, following up on what you were saying and being asked: the Government's plans are for the new single regulator to come in in 2028, which is obviously 11 years after Grenfell. Do you think that timetable is sufficient to meet the needs of how serious and urgent this is?

If I could then go to Kim and Andy: do you think the implementation of the Phase 2 recommendations on resilience could ensure that a disaster on the scale of Grenfell would be responded to very differently in the future in your organisations?

**Philip White:** On the timescale, the key area that needs to be expedited is around products. Some reform has happened, but not to the extent or as quickly as the regime under the Building Safety Act 2022. There are some things that could be built out fairly quickly on the back of the work we have already done in the Building Safety Regulator. But, as I said earlier, there is a good framework there and good coverage in terms of the legal requirements pertaining to the built environment, so I have confidence in that at one level.

For me, it is around trying to deliver on the additional asks from the public inquiry, but also trying to bring a bit of rationalisation so there are not too many overlaps or—shall we say—rubbing points with other regulators because that can get quite complicated for some building owners and developers.

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** In response to one of your questions, Joe, we have committed within our report to do an independent review of culture, which I should have mentioned.

Yes, I believe the council can be confident when facing a disaster or emergency again. I referenced a good practical test of this last year with



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150 people being displaced from their homes at 2 am. I was there first-hand; I arrived early to see how it was dealt with.

The area where I worry is around scale, so major incidents. One criticism of the council was that we did not call for assistance quickly. There is potentially a role to look at in terms of the interrelationship between the GLA and local authorities. Obviously, we are a London council and will not have the resources to deal with anything on scale.

**Andy Roe:** Credit to the Royal Borough, they have done a lot of work around resilience and we saw that in the instance you referred to earlier.

I would say that if we see this implemented in full, it will make a difference because we are already doing much of what is contained within it. We will put people on the ground in a different way to advocate and make sure that the structures to support people in immediacy are followed. We learned that from the fire. What I would say is that it does need to be systemic; there need to be standards that people are mandated to follow.

Perhaps I will finish by just going back to the horror of the night itself. Stepping on to the back of that command unit and looking for a local authority liaison officer, I was confronted with a gentleman—this is no personal reflection on him—whose day job was as a part-time parks police officer. He had never carried out the role of a local authority liaison officer at any sort of incident of scale. We cannot go back to that.

This recommendation holds the promise—if it is systemic and baked into a mandated system—of a framework that every local authority in the country has to subscribe to, and then you will see a consistent response. When it is done well, it works. We see that not in theory but in practice with the boroughs that do this really well. I am afraid we have had a lot of very large and difficult incidents since Grenfell and you really do notice when people do it well and when they do not. What would be good is to continue to push for a more coherent and better recognised national structure with the system to underpin it, as this recommendation says.

Q30 **Mr Forster:** Thanks for the honesty in saying that you have improved, you have more resilience but actually your organisation is just too small to cope with something of scale. What lobbying have you done to try to tackle that? Is this a Mayor of London/London Councils need to have that extra statutory responsibility?

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** I sit on central London Councils and it has been raised; I have raised it as an issue. It is something we can take up with Joe in terms of pushing it more. How that might be organised and what role the GLA might take in it is something for them to consider, but it is certainly an area. Again, I just go back to the day and the fact that the flows were not available. The whole thing could do with a bit of tightening up.





- Q31 **Naushabah Khan:** Lorna, a question to you directly first. The Phase 2 report found that the local authority building control had been vulnerable to manipulation by dishonest manufacturers due to a failure to implement its processes vigorously. How would the expected recommendations improve the way in which the local authority building control operates and avoid this happening again? If I may just ask a question to Kim as well: are you confident that the council's building control team is now in a position to perform its statutory functions in the way that it needs to?

**Dr Stimpson:** There are quite a few questions there, all in one. In terms of manipulation by product manufacturers, yes, that was incredibly unfortunate and a situation that we should not have been in; nobody within the construction industry should have been in that position. In terms of products, the work my colleague mentioned before will hopefully go some way to ensuring that that can never happen again.

The reforms have been enormous in terms of building control; it has been a very difficult and challenging period of time for building control surveyors and bodies. It was the right thing to do and I would not want to lose the rigour in that process of having people prove their competence. As you are aware, we talk a lot about competence within the construction industry. Building control is the first profession that has now been put through a process whereby surveyors have had to prove their competence on a regular basis. I would request one thing: let us not lose that rigour and let us maintain that effectiveness.

The other thing is the rigour in which local authorities and private sector building control are now regulated by the Building Safety Regulator. That has been a long time coming and is again a good thing. Building control has been in a competitive environment for 40-plus years, and some positives and negatives have come with that competition, but invariably there are unavoidable conflicts that come with it. Not long ago, somebody discussed putting profit before people, and that cannot occur. This new regulation of the profession will ensure that that cannot happen. There is more that can be done in terms of mitigating the potential for commercial interests.

- Q32 **Chair:** On commercial interests, do you feel that the building control function should be taken away from the local level and regulated or performed by a national authority?

**Dr Stimpson:** I am absolutely convinced that building control should be a local delivery model. It is something that can and should sit within local authorities.

- Q33 **Naushabah Khan:** I have a follow-up question on what you said around the regulation. Do you think that has created challenges in recruitment and resourcing? Is it a potential issue going forward in terms of whether you actually have a resource in place to be able to implement everything you should be doing?



**Dr Stimpson:** There are most definitely resourcing issues in building control within the public and private sectors. There are not enough building control surveyors or registered building inspectors in the world; we need more of them. We have been very fortunate in that the Government have provided us with grant funding to bring in new public service building control surveyors. In the last two years, we have brought in 150 new people but lost an awful lot of people from building control for many reasons.

One reason is that this regulation of the profession has been concerning to some people, but we also have an ageing demographic in building control. There are lots of reasons for that, such as decades of austerity within local authorities and lack of training within local authorities for new building control. Over 50% of building control surveyors are in their 50s. That means that there is a very real risk—or an absolute inevitability—that those people will be lost, so we need to bring more people into the profession as soon as possible. We desperately need that to happen sooner rather than later, because we need to draw on those people's experience before we lose them. You don't learn how to be a building control surveyor out of a book; you learn it from surveying with those very experienced people.

We have been out to recruitment. In terms of difficulty in recruiting, we have not found a problem. We have had 10 times more applicants for roles than we have been able to take on, and it is not just young people. I want to say that young people come into the profession but they are not all young. They may be people transferring from second and third careers, but people want to serve their communities and be part of a regulated profession. It has taken our profession of building control to that next level and is now an aspirational-type career. That has happened over the last two years; it has been an incredibly transformational period of time for building control, and long may it continue.

Q34 **Councillor Taylor-Smith:** Just to start by saying that the inquiry was explicit in that building control was the last line of defence, and in that regard, the council completely failed.

Picking up on what Lorna said, there is a big issue in terms of recruiting the right people at the moment; they are in demand. We have had a fourfold increase in our building control team, but it comes back to the fundamental cycle I was talking about of resilience, absolute training, and making sure that the people we have are professionally accredited. That was an issue in terms of people and their experience.

As to whether it sits better in the council, I would be in favour of a local authority, essentially because it is not involving profit; we are doing a job. I have certainly seen instances where building control is getting a job on the basis of its fee or helping people, and we need to be very mindful of that and stop it.



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**Dr Stimpson:** We don't have enough building control surveyors, and I will reiterate that point. There are a lot of building control surveyors in the private sector. Private sector does not necessarily mean a bad thing. There are other ways that mitigation can be put in place so that commercialism does not have that much of an impact; what I mean are things like statutory inspections, which were removed in 2012. Reinstate statutory inspections and have a minimum requirement of what you expect building control surveyors to do on sites, rather than them being able to risk-assess how much inspection they are going to do. Maybe statutory charges: bring in basic charging regimes for building control work so that everybody is working within the same envelope. There are things that the independent panel that is being formed can take some insight from.

**Philip White:** Obviously, the Building Safety Regulator now regulates the building control profession. We have raised issues with MHCLG alongside the London Fire Brigade and the National Fire Chiefs Council about capacity. There really does need to be almost a five to 10-year strategy and plan to invest in this profession, not least because the Government have very ambitious targets for housebuilding, which needs a strategic approach.

The other thing is that we have built the foundations to regulate the profession and it has been quite painful. It is going to be in a much better place. We are actually inspecting building control providers, both public and private, and have done 20% of those bodies this year, which is beneficial in terms of improving the standards. Part of it is about behaviours and tackling the conflict of interest, so there is a really good foundation to build out from.

**Andy Roe:** Rather than repeat what anyone else has said, I wanted to highlight one thing that needs to be debated in the open but speaks to Philip's point around capacity. In our position, in particular, we recognise that, because we are a regulator as well, we have to achieve a proportionate balance to enable growth in housing because that is the other devil in all this.

As much as we have to recognise the colossal and unnecessary loss of life because regulation failed, decent housing is equally needed because the absence of it is dangerous. Frequently, on a daily basis, among our two high-rise fires a day, we will tip out to very poorly converted office-to-residential properties—like the Spectrum Building—or we will go to inappropriately used basements. We will go to temporary structures with 18 people living across three rooms where there is no fire safety.

As appalling as Grenfell is, when we look at the statistics around fire deaths, where people actually die is in those spaces, and they die in some numbers. That is directly related to the volume and availability of decent and safe housing. I accept that we have a responsibility—as do all my colleagues here—to tighten up on the regulation, but I would



welcome that debate being played out in the open because, to be fair to the Government, it is not an easy problem to solve.

**Councillor Taylor-Smith:** In our experience, particularly in the aftermath when we were acquiring newbuild to accommodate the bereaved and survivors, there was an issue with the quality of what we were buying. When you think of an industry where the developer is getting 20% and is subcontracting to a contractor at a 2% margin, the pressure on keeping that margin and not doing things well is really there. That is a problem with the industry.

**Chair:** Going back to the issue around profit before people, and the acceptance of the market to recognise what Edward said around Celotex and Kingspan still being used on buildings, how do we make sure those buildings are not signed off, and that there is proper oversight on building controls at all levels going forward?

Q35 **Lewis Cocking:** Andy, you have answered some of my questions about the fire service and you said earlier that the recommendations you have implemented throughout the inquiries and reports are not just a tick-box exercise for you. Can you explore that in a bit more detail for us and give us some comfort that, just because you have done something, you are going to continuously improve and make sure you are continuing to do the new practises you have put in place? On planning, does the London Fire Brigade respond to planning applications as a consultee—particularly around high-rise—so you can advise and give evidence to councillors when they are making their decision about what should and should not get planning permission? Could you just answer those two points?

**Andy Roe:** To start with the first one, the change at LFB in terms of its operational response to high-rise—what was laid out in the 29 recommendations from the first phase of the inquiry—has been total. It is a repeated cycle of embedded training. We are just onto our second cycle now of revised high-rise training, which is both theoretical and practical in terms of very large-scale exercising. It is baked into instant command, where we now have a ticket-to-ride process, so you basically have to be licensed to be an incident commander, which astonishingly we did not have before. It is in millions of pounds of new equipment, which, to the GLA's credit, it has funded. It is in the smoke hoods that we use on a daily and weekly basis to take people out of fires who might not have survived otherwise. So it is pretty much wholesale change across kit, procedures, training, even leadership and the moral and ethical dimension of decision making when things get trickier.

How do we make sure that it is maintained and we go beyond one cycle of it? One, it is written down and is in the public realm. We have promises that we state and then get held to by an independent inspectorate, and I will probably go to that. I love my institution, but I know that we let the community down that night. I actually think that the process of inspection has been the most important thing in terms of shining a very



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rigorous external light on what we are doing, and we have been better for it as an industry and service.

That would be my answer: we have to clearly demonstrate. We have been inspected now on three occasions, with teams on the ground around our progress against recommendations. The standing up of a ministerial advisory group or board to monitor was also useful. We had that from the start, and then the inspectorate stepped into that space and supported it.

So there are different ways we can assure you that it is not just us marking it, but again the most profound example is that we are doing it differently on an almost daily basis. We evacuate buildings all the time; that is the reality of it. We still have 1,300 buildings in London; 840 of them are high-rise and the rest are medium, which need remediation. We tip out to those buildings a fair bit, so it is there in the practical implementation.

Yes, we are consultees at a variety of different points within the process. As Philip will tell you, we make our voice heard, and we make our voice heard in the local environment as well. We are always open to informal inquiry; you can always come to us and ask questions. I get a volume of inquiries into my own inbox every day, which we then push out to our fire safety professionals.

**Philip White:** One thing that was set up by the Building Safety Regulator was what we call Planning Gateway 1. Like the fire authorities, we get sent plans for high-rise buildings from the local authority and we comment alongside the fire authorities. We have done about 3,000 over the last three years since that service was set up. At the beginning, we were commenting on nearly 50% of the applications because, again, developers and designers were not getting the fire safety strategy at that very early time. We are now commenting on just under 20%; ideally, it should be about 10%. Alongside the fire brigade, the Building Safety Regulator is commenting and things are moving in the right direction in terms of developers and designers beginning to comprehend what they need to do at that very early stage before these things come before Gateway 2 building control approval.

**Andy Roe:** I will just make one more point, Chair. I promise it will be quick because I recognise the time. The one thing I would say is that while rightly today we are talking about high-rise and medium-rise buildings, it would be wrong not to articulate the fact that for us already—potentially in the future as well—there is a much more complex landscape of risk for the Building Safety Regulator.

We effectively are custodians of 3.8 million separate dwellings in London, 1 million businesses, and over 500 transport hubs and major infrastructure. Actually, something that keeps me awake at night as much as high-rise is care homes or the state of other public spaces and the building fabric. This is not just about high-rise and medium-rise; we



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have a very complex landscape to get across, without capacity in any part of the system at the moment, so we are back to the education point.

There is a massive job in response to these recommendations, not just to consider high-rise, which we do welcome. We think the Government have made the right start, but we need to see the detail and it needs to be underpinned by the right level of funding to grow capacity and to support growth in that context, but also to deal with the legacy of the past, not just in high-rise but many other forms of buildings—whether it is RAAC in schools, panel systems and so on—so that we avoid the next tragedy.

**Chair:** I am mindful of time. We have overrun considerably this morning but it was important for us to get some of those key areas and questions in. I want to thank everyone for coming this morning. I know that all your respective organisations continue to try to help the Government navigate this. In listening to the comments from the first panel around a timeframe, as we come up to another anniversary, what has really changed on that? I hope all of you will continue to engage with the Government on this, providing those key answers as we work to ensure that we never see a situation like this again, not just in London but anywhere across the country.