

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: Grenfell and Building Safety, HC 780

Tuesday 1 April 2025

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Members present: Florence Eshalomi (Chair); Lewis Cocking; Maya Ellis; Mr Will Forster; Naushabah Khan; Mr Gagan Mohindra; Joe Powell; Sarah Smith.

Questions 36-81

Witnesses

I: Alex Norris MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Growth and Building Safety, MHCLG; Ben Llewellyn, Interim Director General for Buildings, Resilience and Fire, MHCLG; and Catherine Adams, Director of Building Systems and Insight in the Buildings, Resilience and Fire Group, MHCLG.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alex Norris MP, Ben Llewellyn and Catherine Adams.

Q36 **Chair:** Good morning everyone. Welcome to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee. I am Florence Eshalomi. Will my Committee colleagues please introduce themselves?

Sarah Smith: I am Sarah Smith, the Member of Parliament for Hyndburn.

Maya Ellis: I am Maya Ellis, the Member of Parliament for Ribble Valley.

Naushabah Khan: I am Naushabah Khan, the Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham.

Joe Powell: I am Joe Powell, MP for Kensington and Bayswater.

Mr Forster: I am Will Forster, MP for Woking.

Lewis Cocking: I am Lewis Cocking, MP for Broxbourne, and I am a Hertfordshire county councillor as well.

Mr Mohindra: I am Gagan Mohindra, MP for South West Hertfordshire.

Chair: Will our guests introduce themselves, please?



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Catherine Adams: I am Catherine Adams, director of building systems and insight at the the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Alex Norris: I am Alex Norris, the Member of Parliament for Nottingham North and Kimberley. I am the Minister for building safety and, at some point today, fire.

Ben Llewellyn: I am Ben Llewellyn, interim director general for buildings, resilience and fire.

Q37 **Chair:** Thank you very much for coming to the Committee this morning.

The Government have published their response to the final phase of the Grenfell inquiry which, as you know, looked into the causes behind the tragic fire that took the lives of 72 people. We had a really powerful meeting two weeks ago with Grenfell Next of Kin, Grenfell United, the London Fire Brigade and some other specialists in the building safety sector, to hear their concerns at first hand.

This year, 14 June marks the eight-year anniversary of Grenfell. It is really important for us to look at what the Government are going to do next. There are still buildings across the UK with cladding around them. This morning, we want to delve into some of the areas that come under the Department's responsibility.

One of the key issues that comes up time and again when we discuss Grenfell is the stigma around social housing, with social tenants not being heard and often going ignored. Phase 2 of the inquiry detailed the fact that tenants were not believed when they raised valid concerns. Why do you think their voices continue to be ignored? How can we ensure that in future we listen to and, most importantly, act on the vital concerns of tenants?

Alex Norris: Thank you for having me this morning. I recognise that characterisation from my own mailbox, as I suspect colleagues will too. It still seems too hard for tenants to get the change that they need, or to be listened to, and organisations perhaps see that as either inconvenient or unimportant to them. That has to change.

I do not think it is a surprise that social housing is a particular priority for this Government, in the context of the 1.5 million houses we want to build in this country. We think that social housing will be an anchoring type in that respect, which is why earlier this year we committed an extra £800 million to the affordable homes programme, as well as the £2 billion commitment that we made last week. It will presumably not be a surprise to the Committee that this is a deeply personal issue for the Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister. She believes very strongly that as a Department we have to make sure that tenants have a stronger voice and are listened to.

I want to recognise some of the building blocks that we have inherited from the previous Government. We now have the Regulator of Social Housing, which is an important bulwark in the system—



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Q38 Chair: Do you think the regulator is doing enough to work with social housing providers? When we had the chief executive of the regulator in front of us, she outlined that there was no mechanism for informing tenants when a new inspection had been published. Essentially, many tenants found out through press releases, or those who were connected found out on Twitter. Do you think that is a valid way for the regulator to act?

Alex Norris: We cannot say it is enough if we see the degree of complaints and dissatisfaction that we still see. We should be open to any and all ways of trying to close not only feedback loops but, most importantly, action loops.

Another important thing we inherited from last April is stronger consumer standards, so people have rights. For me, there is a particular gap that needs to close, which probably speaks to the old trade unionist in me: if you do not know what those rights are and how to exercise them, how can you drive change? That is why we are doing our Four Million Homes campaign, which is to say to the 4 million social tenants, "You have enhanced rights and there is regulatory oversight. We now want to give you the skills and confidence to exercise that, and therefore to drive that change within your organisation, addressing both your individual concern and systemic problems." That is a very high-potential intervention that could, taken alongside an expansion of social housing, mean that we have a change moment on culture.

Q39 Chair: Would you say that the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman are swamped with cases? We are seeing what is essentially a backlog. All of us as constituency MPs continue to receive concerns from tenants who say that they have forwarded their complaints and the response from both organisations is, "You'll have to wait to get a response before your claim is assessed."

Alex Norris: I am not sure I could make an assessment on them being "swamped", because I have not had that conversation with them, but I can speak from my experience. Clearly, people are feeling the need to escalate their complaints to them to a significant degree, as they do to us, so the system obviously does not work yet. One of the key signs that it works will be when there is not the same need to escalate because it is resolved first time, at the very first contact with your housing patch manager. At the moment, though, we do not have that system, and that is the system we are trying to build.

Q40 Chair: One of the issues raised with us in our first evidence session was the voices of bereaved families abroad. You will be familiar with the fact that the residents of Grenfell were very diverse, and a number of them do not reside in the UK. As a Department, how are you ensuring that the voices of next of kin and family members from abroad are included in any ongoing decisions and discussions?

Alex Norris: Right from the outset, the Deputy Prime Minister and I made the conscious decision that we would meet with anybody in any format they wanted, and in whatever way helped that access. We do big group



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sessions and we do smaller, facilitated ones—perhaps with some food—with roundtable-type activities. We also do individual meetings. For people who do not live in this country, I have done virtual meetings with people on different continents. We will meet in the evening, in the day and on weekends, because we want to hear those voices.

We need to make sure that our systems are good enough that we know where everybody is and how they want to be engaged with. That is something that we still have not fully achieved yet. From our perspective, we will do whatever it takes to have that quality engagement and the direct relationship that an individual needs, so that they can express their views about whatever aspect of the future.

Q41 Chair: Were they all engaged before the decision to bring down the tower was made?

Alex Norris: That is something that the Deputy Prime Minister and I have reflected on a lot over the last few weeks. I want to say, candidly, that I believe yes. As I say, our answer to everything was yes. Our attempts were, as I say, to have the broadest possible range of engagement moments. That is, of course, on top of the inbound correspondence that comes in and came in directly. So I believe strongly, in my heart of hearts, that the answer is yes. However, if a single person says we failed, that matters much more than what I think, and that is a source of significant sadness and significant reflection on my part, on the Deputy Prime Minister's part and on the Department's part. To improve that in future we are trying to have much better systems so that people are not falling between mailing lists. That is what we are trying to change.

Q42 Chair: Going forward, will you ensure that the design, planning permission and construction, under the Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission, will include a broad range of people, including people abroad?

Alex Norris: Yes. Certainly for the aspects that we control, we are going to do much better in that regard by making sure we have comprehensive databases. We will offer all the opportunities that people want to have that conversation. If anybody listening today wants to have an individual conversation, I will have that in whatever form it needs to happen.

The commission are slightly separate, and I would not want to fetter their independence as to how they do engagement, but I know that they are very mindful of their need to reach the broadest possible range, so I have no doubt that they will do that too. For our part the answer is yes, absolutely.

Chair: Thank you.

Q43 Sarah Smith: Obviously this issue has been back in the news in the last couple of days; that is linked to what I am about to ask. When will the Government make a decision on whether to introduce a national oversight mechanism for overseeing the implementation of recommendations from public inquiries? I ask because the Committee has heard compelling evidence about the need for that to ensure that people can have trust in



implementation in the future.

Alex Norris: The oversight mechanism is something that, exactly as you say, Ms Smith, the Grenfell bereaved and survivors, and next of kin, campaign for compellingly, as do families affected by Hillsborough and by the infected blood scandal—I'm afraid that, sadly, you could line up scandal and failure of the British state after scandal and failure of the British state.

For my part in it, the recommendation in the inquiry stopped at a publicly accessible database. We are delivering that. We have promised quarterly reporting on gov.uk, an annual report to Parliament and an annual session in Parliament for colleagues to scrutinise us. The first report will go up at the end of next month. That is what we are going to do there.

The broader piece is being looked at in the most central parts of Government, by the Cabinet Office. I know there is a lot of interest in the Hillsborough law and the implications for the duty of candour. It probably will not surprise you that in preparation for this session I asked colleagues about the status of that; I believe it is coming imminently. I cannot speak to where that then finishes for the piece of work on the oversight mechanism, because that is a Cabinet Office-led one, but the calls are being understood and that will be addressed in future, in terms of the model the Government choose.

Q44 **Sarah Smith:** Why do you think there has been such a delay in bringing it forward? Why haven't the Government already committed to introducing it?

Alex Norris: I can only speak for my own views on this. You want to get it right, first of all. This is a really important thing that people are putting a lot of stock into. You have to find the balance, it seems to me, between what the Committee is doing here, what Parliament will do all day every day, the relationship between the Government and the electorate at election time, and then the transparency outside. That is not an easy balance to find. It is right that the right degree of oversight is being put together in a way that is effective and delivers what people would want to see. I think that probably accounts for that.

Q45 **Sarah Smith:** You have said you will publish updates on gov.uk; is that a bit like the Government marking their own homework, in terms of the process behind it?

Alex Norris: Having looked at the previous evidence, I have reflected on the point about marking our own homework. I have to say that in preparing for this Committee I did not feel like I was marking my own homework. I feel—as you all look back at me in this way—like my homework is very much being marked for me. Similarly, when I stand up on Monday at oral questions and up to 600 colleagues can ask basically whatever they want to ask on a very broad range of things, it feels like scrutiny. I am a member of the Executive, so maybe I would say that.



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What we publish will be in the format that mirrors the report, so it will not be answering our own questions. It will be done recommendation by recommendation: "Here's what we're doing. Here's our progress. Here's what is going to happen next." It will be publicly out there. I know that the Committee will take an interest, and that the bereaved and survivors will take an interest, as will the next of kin and the immediate community. I feel like it will be out there. I have no interest in trying to finesse that. We want to deliver; it is really important.

You can quickly take our work on building safety more generally to very esoteric places when it comes to approved documents and construction products, but we do not forget what sits at the heart of that, which is 72 people losing their lives due to a catastrophic public, private, national and local failure. The Government of the day therefore have a profound responsibility to deliver on that. From our perspective, we want to be very candid about that, because we want to try to build faith in the state again for people who, quite rightly, are questioning that faith.

Q46 Sarah Smith: There is a huge need for greater transparency; would you consider making publicly available the tracker that I believe is in use in the Department?

Alex Norris: The tracker that we publish quarterly will reflect our departmental position. There will always be, as you would expect, internal debates and conversations about the best ways to do things, but what we put in the public domain will reflect what we are talking about and what we think. It will be a very sober reflection on where we are.

Chair: So that is a yes.

Alex Norris: I am not sure of the distinction between the two things, so I would not want to say something that I cannot deliver on. To be clear, the picture that I as Minister look at regularly with Ben, Catherine and the team—that picture of the recommendation, what we are doing and what we will do next—is what will go into the public domain.

Q47 Lewis Cocking: I want to follow up on one of those questions, because I got lost in your answer, Minister. Are the Government going to introduce a national oversight mechanism—yes or no?

Alex Norris: I cannot make that commitment today, Mr Cocking. That is a Cabinet Office-run process. I have made a commitment in line with what we published in the inquiry, on the publicly available information, and there is ongoing work across Government on the national oversight mechanism more generally.

Lewis Cocking: So it is a no.

Alex Norris: That is—

Q48 Chair: To come back to the evidence that we heard from survivors and next of kin, one of their clear frustrations was that in a period of seven to eight months there was nothing—no information; just silence. We find



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ourselves a matter of months from the eighth anniversary; what key progress has been made? I mentioned the fact that, unfortunately, there are still buildings with dangerous cladding, and we saw the firefighters respond to the fire in Dagenham—there are still hazards.

If there is no way to scrutinise and track what the Government are doing, you can see why there is frustration among a number of people. If you are saying that the Government may not publish the national oversight mechanism and your tracker will not be open to public scrutiny, in what way will we as a Committee and, most importantly, the survivors and other people be able to track what is happening with the Government?

Alex Norris: On the oversight mechanism, I am saying that I cannot make that commitment today. That work is ongoing at the very centre of Government. On the tracker, that will be publicly available. People will be able to scrutinise it and talk to us about it.

We are very mindful of progress. I think I am probably unique among Members here in that I came to Parliament just in the week of the fire. As I have said in Parliament multiple times, if we had seen then the progress that we have made nearly eight years on, we would have said it was not sufficient. Of course, we have had a seven-year inquiry that had to run its course in its own way. It is right that we took time to reflect on that as a Government, because we wanted to make sure that our response was a good one that we were able to deliver on.

Bits are starting to come out of the system. As I say, we have the machinery of government change today, and approved document B. Those changes have already taken place. You mentioned the Dagenham fire; some of the related different cultures and practices were operationalised on that day. So it would not be fair to say that no change had happened. I know that there is eagerness to change, but we want this to be a significant watershed moment in building safety in this country.

If you read our response to the inquiry and what we plan to do, particularly with regard to construction regulation, alongside our Green Paper on construction products, you will see that this is a really significant change moment. It will mean that building 1.5 million houses can be done differently in this country. Yes, it takes time, but that is the right thing to do, and as a result we can get to somewhere really important. That is our priority.

Q49 **Joe Powell:** Before I start, I put on the record my thanks for all the Minister's engagement with me and the community.

I want to go into remediation in a bit more detail. I am sure you will have read the Public Accounts Committee report, which says there are still "unacceptable levels of uncertainty and lack of action in resolving the cladding crisis", and that the PAC lacks confidence that "MHCLG's current activity will be sufficient to effectively" implement the new plan. A journalist who has covered this issue said today that 10 buildings a month have been completed, so it will take 75 years on current trends. How confident are you that all high-rise residential buildings with unsafe



cladding will be remediated by the new deadline of 2029? What are you doing to speed up the process?

Alex Norris: When I took over as Minister, I inherited a trajectory on which the effective remediation of buildings in the way you talk about was going to take us into the 2040s. It will probably not surprise you that one of the first questions I asked as the new Minister was, “How many buildings are we talking about here?” The answer for buildings of 11 to 18 metres was that we did not know. I have drawn on some good things that the previous Government did, but I am afraid that not knowing that was a particular shortcoming that we have inherited. The range being 4,000 to 7,000 really does not help very much. We are in overdrive, to say the least, to crunch that number on 11 to 18 metres.

Similarly, we have made significant progress on and enhancements to the developer contract, which means we are now getting to a phase where those buildings are being done not by the end of the decade, which is the target, but much sooner than that. We will move into the phase where we get past the buildings in respect of which people are willing to do the right thing, and we will have to be a lot harder on enforcement. That will be part of our approach. All this was consolidated in the acceleration plan that we published in December. I think that demonstrates a marked acceleration on the default trajectory that we inherited.

I have read closely what Pete Apps has said in the last day or so. We will respond to the PAC report in the way you would expect us to. The choice we had as a Government was not between the trajectory inherited, which simply was not good enough, and a model that meant we could click our fingers and that would change. The best option available was the one that we have got, and that is what we are working to.

I have read closely Pete’s suggestion, for example. It is not uncommon, when people suggest other other ways in which we should do this differently, for them to start with, “If the Government is willing to front out untold tens of billions of pounds”—I think up to £16 billion was the number Pete used—“things could be resolved much more quickly, and that could recoverable later” in ways that, frankly, I do not think are that clear. I do not think that is an alternative model. My assessment as the Minister—there will be people who challenge this, and I absolutely respect that—was that this was the best acceleration available. That is what we are putting all our efforts into.

Q50 **Joe Powell:** You specified in the remediation plan that additional legislation may be needed. Obviously, that might include primary legislation on the stick, if you like, in respect of going building by building and getting it done. First, can you update us on when you expect to bring forward legislation and what its main components might be? Secondly, when will the regulations be laid to mandate PEEPs in residential buildings above 11 metres?

Alex Norris: I will answer the second question first, because the answer is slightly quicker. We will lay the regulations on PEEPs in this coming



quarter. Frankly, the hold-up is on my end, in that I take responsibility for PEEPs from today—assuming that the King is minded to move the responsibility—and I want to look at them. I want to talk first to some people who have expressed concerns, and I think it is right that that happens. But we will lay those regulations shortly—as I say, in this quarter.

With regard to other legislation, it is already the responsibility of a building owner to make sure that it is safe, so there are already powers that can be and are used. Part of the challenge has been a lack of heft in enforcement, so we are putting more money into enforcement—particularly via mayoral combined authorities and the local remediation plans that they are bringing forwards, working with us—as a way of improving that. As the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have said, nevertheless there is likely to need to be backstop legislation for those who simply will not do the right thing. Obviously, you do not want to rush to that element, but that is likely to be part of our approach. Future legislation will obviously be announced in the usual way. I cannot make an announcement today on dates for that sort of thing.

Q51 Joe Powell: Could you explain the goal of the legislation a bit more? You mentioned a backstop. How will it help to deliver this new target?

Alex Norris: There are gaps in the system that it could help to target. First, we are having to crunch 11 to 18 metres. The very good people at Homes England are going through this building by building by building. For buildings over 18 metres, there is an obligation for a building owner to say, “Hey, I’ve got an over 18-metre building, and this is the nature of its external walls.” The same should apply to those buildings between 11 metres and 18 metres, too.

Similarly, simplifying some of the enforcement powers would be an option for that sort of legislation, but in the end, it is the size of your backstop to say what the final consequences are for people who will not do the right thing and the degree to which the Government could step in.

Q52 Joe Powell: I have another timeline question. The consultation on the proposals in the “Construction Products Reform” Green Paper closes on 21 May. What is your timeline following that for implementing the proposals?

Alex Norris: I really, really want to get on with this. That is the reason for a sharp 45-day consultation. The Green Paper reflected long-running conversations with industry. I think Philip White said it in the previous session: products are a bit of an underpriced element in the safety regime. I think people would be surprised that a third of construction products in this country are covered by regulation. That is quite a big old gap.

We have to move quickly because the European Union is moving. The BSI has had involvement in some of the standards development there, but product manufacturing is a big part of our economy. That was reflected in all those questions around internal markets that Members of previous Parliaments were so used to hearing about. We have to make a quick decision there, too. This will not be a Green Paper that then goes to, “Oh,



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well, the Government are going to reply to it in due course." We are going to press on with this because it is really important.

Q53 Joe Powell: I have a final question on remediation. The London Fire Commissioner said in his evidence that the state of care homes was the thing that kept him awake at night the most. Are you confident that care homes are being sufficiently protected? Obviously, the Government have announced that new care homes will have mandatory sprinklers, but what about pre-existing care homes?

Alex Norris: As you say, we have gone to the point of mandatory sprinklers for new facilities. The judgment made on impact was that, for existing facilities, the building owners need to manage that fire risk. It could be by the installation of sprinklers by choice. That way, there could be alternative models depending on the construction of the building. Of course, this would take us into the PEEP space in the no-too-distant future. That combination is how we can be assured of a safe regime in care homes.

Q54 Chair: As we seek to accelerate the remediation, is it a fair assessment to say that there is no remediation for those leaseholders who are caught up with non-cladding defects? Non-qualifying leaseholders are still having to pay in excess of hundreds of thousands of pounds for defects in buildings that they bought in good faith. This April, those leaseholders will see their bills go up, their service charges go up and insurance premiums go up. They have no clarity on fire risk assessments or external wall survey assessments. We saw the scandal of fake EWS1 forms. What hope and what remediation will those leaseholders be getting?

Alex Norris: The most important thing for anybody living in those buildings is the remediation of them, and the right day for that was yesterday—or five years-worth of yesterdays. We acknowledged that. I can speak only to what I said earlier: we are trying to bring that forward for all buildings to the quickest practical level. That is where we start. There are obviously significant day-to-day challenges that leaseholders are living with, including their service charges and particularly around insurances, as you mentioned. We committed in the RAP that we would be working with the insurance industry to see what we might be able to do to reduce premiums.

That process has started; I am talking directly to the insurance industry, as are officials. Around the time of the SR, we will have a refreshed RAP at that point, which will feed back on that point. That will hopefully provide some relief in that regard. On the EWS1 form, that is a lenders' tool; it is not a fire safety certificate. I encourage people to look at the publicly available alternatives. The mortgage lender panel says it will take alternatives such as acceptance into a Government scheme or a leaseholder certificate, other than that EWS1 form.

One of the most challenging questions for someone sitting in my chair is on qualifying and non-qualifying leasehold, and the fundamental question about where burden falls. It is important that I say this candidly. The



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threshold says that you can own three properties, which basically means your own property, but you may have had circumstances change, such as an unexpected child or unexpected caring responsibilities, so you can become an accidental landlord really easily into two properties—maybe even into a third. That seems to be the sensible level of personal protection. I have been pressed by campaigners to look at that, and we have looked at it closely, but I am not planning huge changes in that regard.

Q55 Chair: But you will continue to engage with organisations and campaign groups like End Our Cladding Scandal on this.

Alex Norris: Yes. I meet them frequently. The next time I see them will be mid-afternoon on Thursday. On a final point about non-qualifying leasehold, there is the enduring question of the “in perpetuity” status of non-qualifying leases. I can understand the original intention, in the sense that once remediation is done, it is essentially moot, but I think that in a market it may not quite work that way, so we are looking very closely at what we might be able to do to sunset that.

Q56 Mr Forster: Mark Reynolds, the chief executive of the Construction Leadership Council, told us that it is taking up to 11 months or 48 weeks—so pretty much a year—for the Building Safety Regulator to sign off on the safety of housing schemes. Do you think we as a country, but particularly you as a Government, are getting the balance right between ensuring that residential buildings are as safe as possible, while not undermining the target of 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament? How are you going to look to tackle the delays in the Building Safety Regulator’s ability to sign off the safety of buildings? For example, should it focus on issues where there is the most life-critical, dangerous cladding? How will you review that going forward?

Alex Norris: This is a conversation I am having on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis with the industry. We have a significant target of 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and we as a Department have been clear that that is not in contest with building safety. It is not seen as a trade-off, negotiation or bargain. We have to have a safe regime. It is right always that the process of going through the BSR for those applications feels like hurdles to clear, because they are. They are hurdles for constructors and owners to clear, and be able to say, “This building is safe, and in 15 years’ time, our successors will not be sitting here having the same conversation about remediation.” I would defend that principle really strongly.

The quid pro quo is that operationally we need to ensure that the BSR’s processes are as good as possible, to make sure that that process is not any longer than it needs to be. I am not sure I would recognise the characterisation of the length of time, because it has come down. We will get reporting in the next couple of days on the end-of-year performance of BSR. I meet them on a three-weekly basis. We talk about performance all the time. We have put an extra £2 million into the operations of the organisation to try to improve that. Of the time they have available, they



often lose about half of it in the establishment of multidisciplinary teams—that is, getting together their people, the council's people and the fire and rescue people. We have got to concertina that down.

There are some very interesting ideas that Andy Roe, who Mr Powell mentioned, and others have brought forward—in concert with the National Fire Chiefs Council and the BSR—on ways to do that. We are working with them on that. For me, it is a little bit of both: the process does have to feel onerous, because it is a real check and balance, but we need to make sure it is the best possible one that it can be—one that promotes safety but helps houses get built. That is very much the goal we are working in the service of.

Q57 Mr Forster: Are you going to commit to providing the Building Safety Regulator with the ability to address building safety issues directly with organisations and employers, rather than having the current building-by-building approach? Have you been lobbied to try to speed this up? The Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill is meant to speed up the process of building new homes. You said that you dispute the numbers, but they came from Mark Reynolds: that that is adding almost an extra year on to a delay. It can take a year to get planning permission—sometimes even longer via appeal—and you then have a year for mobilisation. You are then adding a further year for this. You are quite right that building safety is an absolute priority, but if someone thinks of a scheme now, you are effectively adding three years to it. That surely destroys the 1.5 million target.

Alex Norris: Absolutely—we cannot have this component of that process take a year. I totally agree: it is weeks, not a year. In terms of lobbying, I am engaged very frequently by the industry, and I get a lot of correspondence. I signed a letter back to one of the developers only yesterday. The onus is on me to make it operationally as strong as possible.

We should give some regard to the BSR. It is a relatively new organisation, this is a relatively new process and the trajectory is improving. Perhaps I should not dispute the characterisation, but I would say that the trajectory is getting better than that, and the reality today is not quite as stark as that—I think that is a fairer way to put it. The onus is on me as a Minister to give them the right tools.

You mentioned the point around direct engagement. I am open, fundamentally. The BSR should do its job in the best way that it thinks it can. My belief is that it does not want a particularly account-manager-style engagement with the industry. It would be for the BSR to decide how it can most effectively feed back. One of the challenges has been that the quality of applications is not very good, and therefore there has been a lot of bounce back. Again, the BSR is engaging with the industry more broadly about that point—that is a very good thing to do.

If you are going to have a multi-site development in the same area, there is also a question about whether having a multidisciplinary team for each building is an effective process. Could we be more joined up there—having



each building looked at on its merits, but one team doing that? I think there is scope for that. At significant points in the chain, there are really important operational things that could be done better. That is what we are working with it to do.

- Q58 Joe Powell:** I have a follow-up question on the 1.5 million homes target and building safety. I am sure you will know that starts for new social homes have dropped significantly—90% in London and 39% nationally. Something we have heard from the National Housing Federation and others is that the cost of remediation, particularly for housing associations, is a significant component. There are lots of other reasons why that has happened, but it is a significant component. Their research, which you will have seen released yesterday, suggests that 91,000 new social homes could be built with the costs that they are expected to pay for remediation. Why do they not have full and equal access to the building safety fund, and is that something the Government will consider providing?

Alex Norris: It is important to say that those organisations can access the building safety fund—previously, the cladding safety scheme. But I accept—they have said this to me directly—that what they have to do in order to do that, which is to say that the cost would make their entity unviable, is not a very attractive prospect. I read that report too, and I totally recognise that characterisation.

Quite rightly, those organisations are putting health and safety first—you would expect any organisation to do that—but that is no doubt limiting our ability to build social housing, so we are looking very closely at that, ahead of our RAP refresh. Social housing will be a major theme of that. I would not want to run ahead of that, but I can tell the Committee that in the summer we will publish our approach in that regard. We totally accept the characterisation that you and the report mention, Mr Powell.

- Q59 Joe Powell:** On the other side of the equation, we also heard from some of the house builders on the building safety levy. In your letter to the Committee, you said that that will come into force in 2026. Has there been an impact assessment on the building safety levy specifically and the 1.5 million home target? It was a question asked at PAC when I was guesting, and it was not quite clear whether that impact assessment had been done.

Alex Norris: In our design and preparation of the regulations we did all the impact assessments that you would expect, whether that is for environmental or equality responsibilities. In Government we have discussed the challenges and the impact that it might have on supply. I think that speaks to why we have given more time for the industry to get ready. That is why, as you mentioned, we have decided to delay the implementation. We are looking at that in the round.

- Q60 Joe Powell:** I never speak for Grenfell campaigners—they can speak for themselves—but I am absolutely certain that the last thing that they would want is access to the building safety fund, the building safety regulator and the building safety levy to mean fewer social homes in this country. I am certain that they want to see more, because they tell me that regularly. We must get this balance right, so that we can deliver



those homes that people desperately need. That is so crucial.

Alex Norris: They say exactly the same thing to me, and our view is exactly the same. We just want to have that good and appropriate balance that means that the process works effectively but still holds safety at its heart.

Q61 **Maya Ellis:** To build on the theme of how we move forward safely and efficiently, we heard concerns from stakeholders about the lack of resource in the building control sector. Can you tell me a bit about how you are planning to ensure that enough building controllers and surveyors can be recruited across the sector?

Alex Norris: One of the very important recommendations in the inquiry was the establishment of a panel to assess and bring forward ideas on building control. We are setting that up very soon. It is a real challenge within the system, as it is with fire risk assessors. Unless you have enough high-quality building control professionals available in an environment where they do not have conflicts or perverse incentives, you are not going to have a safe environment. We are highly motivated in this space. Money has previously been put in to develop more building control professionals and it may well be that we have to do more of that.

I met the combined authorities yesterday on the topic of remediation, and the sadness is that these should be brilliant careers. These are great careers in building control: problem-solving, varied, skilled, important and with the ability to work for yourself if you want to. But we have a workforce profile that means that not only do we have problems now, but we will have very significant problems if we do not act now. We have to play an important part in workforce planning. I do not want to run too far ahead of what the independent panel will report, but for me, it is really important that we are developing enough people to be filling these roles in the future because they should be great jobs.

Q62 **Maya Ellis:** You said “very soon”; could you give us more of an indication of when you expect the independent panel to be appointed?

Alex Norris: I expect the announcement of the chair to be any day now. Can I just say it—it is probably easier? It is going to be Judith Hackitt. I keep telling people, but it was never clear whether we had announced it or not. We have asked Dame Judith Hackitt to chair it, and she has said that she will. We are now pulling together people who will sit on the panel and I know they want to get on with it and we want to get on with it.

Q63 **Maya Ellis:** Great. I appreciate that you are still working on this, but can you tell me a bit about the criteria and experience you have looked for when appointing members of that panel, and whether their role will be purely advisory, or will the Government have to accept their recommendations?

Alex Norris: It will be advisory in the sense that it is not statutory. We have largely asked Judith to convene her own team. When you had Philip White before the Committee, he was about to go on to a session with the industry responsibility group—I am getting its name slightly wrong. I



mean the coalition of the willing, as they call themselves—people within the construction industry who want to raise and change standards. There is an important point here that for all our regulatory and legislative change, culture in the building industry also has to change. Judith is going to pull her people from that group, so it will be senior leaders in the industry who have put their hands up and said that the industry needs to change. That is really positive.

Q64 Maya Ellis: How concerned are you that shortages in the workforce may negatively impact the Government's ability to achieve their house building targets?

Alex Norris: At the moment, building control is keeping its head above water. I am more worried about down the line. We need to ensure that we are growing and developing the workforce, and that we have an environment where that practice that is as safe as possible. That is what I am particularly motivated by.

Q65 Chair: One of the frustrations across leaseholders, tenants and even us as MPs, is about the fragmentation of construction industry safety standards. There are so many different bodies. One of the key things in the inquiry was around the fact that the arrangements under which the construction industry is regulated have become too fragmented—to the point where no one is willing to take responsibility. I think that is the key area that we are hearing back about, in terms of any possible prosecutions and liability for what has happened. The way forward is that the Secretary of State has announced looking at a single regulator, which would be a welcome move. Can you outline the remit for the single regulator? You have just spoken about the Building Safety Regulator, so how will this be different?

Alex Norris: We want consolidated regulation. The remit that we are starting from is the remit within the inquiry report. The only exceptions to that—and this may be another line of questioning—are that, because of the potential conflicts of interest, actual direct testing and certification should happen outside the regulator itself. Beyond that, my starting principle is that everything is in. We are still having that conversation, whether it is with the BSR or the OPSS. We are appointing a chief construction adviser in line with the inquiry recommendation shortly. That individual will then help us with engagement and publication of a prospectus on the regulator this autumn.

As I said, my view is that there should be a maximalist approach to that. There should be as much in there as possible, for all the reasons that you have mentioned, Chair. There has been too much fragmentation, which has led to a lack of accountability. We are going to have a new system, and it needs to be governed by strong central leadership. The word used by Peter Apps in the previous session was “transformative”, and I totally share that characterisation—we need to ensure that it is. My belief is that we put everything in there.

Q66 Chair: That is good. Going back to what I mentioned around the frustration of survivors and next of kin in terms of the timeline and that



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things are moving slowly, what is the timeline for bringing forward the legislation to establish the single construction regulator?

Alex Norris: The chief construction adviser will come shortly, which will then lead us to the prospectus publication in the autumn. Not all of that will be legislative, but quite a bit will be. We will then have to bring forward legislation—I cannot run ahead of King’s Speeches in terms of Sessions and similar, but we know we need to do this. It is a real priority, so we want to get on with it.

Chair: So there will be a consultation process that the Committee can probably feed into.

Alex Norris: Absolutely.

Chair: And you have an appointment process for the chief exec.

Alex Norris: We will be looking very closely at what you report here as part of our development process as well.

On the outstanding question, Mr Cocking, I have had this conversation with the shadow Secretary of State, because he has had a different view to me on this. I think pretty much everybody seems to be aligned around the themes that were in the report. The question comes down to what our colleagues think of our assessment of the risk of a conflict of interest in having a body that sets, assesses and certifies standards all under one roof. We believe that creates a conflict of interest. Instead, the spirit of what you are trying to achieve—strong standards that you can confidently rely on—could be better delivered by those standards being set by the regulator, but delivered by bodies that they license because they have proven that they can properly and transparently test. That is the major question. We have stated our view on that, and I will be interested in what the Committee says, as I am in what the Opposition, the industry and others say, as we make our final decisions.

Q67 **Chair:** Do you have any concerns about the capacity of the new regulator?

Alex Norris: It will be for the Government of the day to ensure that it has the capacity. Very much in the spirit that I mentioned to Mr Forster, there has to be a regime that feels onerous to work with because that is how you know it is working, but there is a responsibility on everyone to make sure that within that the processes are as good as possible. That means sometimes you have to come forward with more resources, which is why we have put £2 million more into the BSR, for example. So that will be very much the conversation as we go.

Q68 **Lewis Cocking:** I want to concentrate on your new role with some aspects of fire safety. Obviously we have got a Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention and now you are going to take on some responsibility for fire. Can you explain to us what you are doing and what is still left with them?

Alex Norris: The machinery of government change we have made reflects what was in the report. That is the transfer of fire functions from the



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Home Office to MHCLG so that building and safety and fire—as it has been, as it has moved in and out between MHCLG and the Home Office—are consolidated under one roof. The exception to that is the Home Office will still have oversight of the inspectorate because obviously it is a joint police and fire inspectorate—HMICFRS. But otherwise fire functions and the fire staff currently in the Home Office are coming over to MHCLG. This is my day one in the role, and we may still be minus an hour or two because it is a decision that is presumed to be effective from today, but the functions are shifting to MHCLG. That is my short answer to your question.

Q69 Lewis Cocking: So you are saying that the police part of the inspectorate is taking precedent over the fire inspectorate, because you are saying the reason why that is staying with the current Minister is because she has responsibility for police. I am taking from you that we do not think fire is important enough to have you around the table and involved with that inspectorate as well.

Alex Norris: I do not think that that would be a reasonable conclusion to draw. The reality is you have a single inspectorate so you have two choices: you either make a division of that organisation, in which case I think you have to say what goal that is in pursuit of, or you have a hosting Department, which is what the Home Office will be, and then you have what we will have, which is a memorandum of understanding between the Department and the inspectorate to make sure that those functions are being fulfilled properly. Quite rightly, that inspectorate has a significant degree of independence because otherwise it cannot work properly but this is about finding that balance. It would be a significant leap to read into that some sort of diminution in interest, and in fact I think you will find, certainly given my personal passion for this area of policy, that you will see a great deal of interest from MHCLG, and I am very much looking forward to it.

Q70 Lewis Cocking: So you will definitely be around the table with that inspectorate and involved as much as you possibly can be?

Alex Norris: Absolutely. I have met with Roy Wilsher already. He forms part of the ministerial advisory group that I will be relying on to develop policy. We will be working very closely with the inspectorate indeed, obviously with appropriate gaps between the Executive and the inspectorate.

Q71 Lewis Cocking: We had someone from the London Fire Brigade here when we looked into Grenfell and he was saying he would welcome a national oversight mechanism for the changes that they have had to make to the fire brigade and he would welcome someone looking at making sure they implement all of the recommendations. What is your view on that type of thing happening in the fire brigade?

Alex Norris: First, I think it reflects well and probably speaks to the improvements made within LFB that that is, from the top, what they want. My experience has been that they have invited transparency at every turn. I wish we saw more of that. It is a good way of building confidence in the future that when changes have to be made they are made. There is the



broader conversation about the oversight mechanism, as addressed to the Chair and to Ms Smith, and decisions will be made at the very centre of Government at some point soon. I can see the value of this, but they have been able to do that without that oversight mechanism because they have shown that they wanted to change and that is a really big start.

Q72 Mr Forster: You have robustly defended the shift of power and saying you think the system can work as of tomorrow. Do you think the inspectorate is sufficiently well resourced and balanced between the police and fire service side of things? Can they do equal amounts of police reviews and fire service reviews, so it is a 50:50 partnership, or is this sufficient based on risk and demand?

Alex Norris: I would not say that my personal view would be that it should be a 50:50 split, because the size is different and the estate is different, and we should always match up against risk. I will confess that I am still a little bit in the foothills of this, but having looked at it, I think that a third of the resources of that organisation goes into fire. The LFB is probably a good example of this, in that they have had three inspections—I think that was the figure the commissioner gave when he was with you—in recent years. So there is a lot of activity going on.

There is a lot to do. One of the things—sorry, I am in danger of answering my own question, but there is a lot to do in fire, particularly around culture, that we need to know is changing. That would be one of those driving factors, as well. I have to say that I do not have a concern about the inspectorate's formulation at this stage.

Q73 Mr Forster: As I said, this is reassuring. You think that a third of the budget and third of the inspections going to fire is useful; would you worry if it falls below a certain level?

Alex Norris: I would want form to follow function, such as on whether deadlines were not being met—well, it is quite hard to believe that statutory deadlines would not be met. But if there were concerns raised about quality, that sort of thing would tell you whether the resourcing was not right, but I would wait to see that before I before I express concern about it.

Q74 Chair: Minister, one of the other issues raised in response to the tragedy was around civil emergency planning and resilience. The phase 2 report detailed some glaring findings about both the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the TMO, and about some areas where there could be improvements in fire safety.

In response, the Government are set to review the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. My understanding is that there will be a consultation later on this year. That sits within the Cabinet Office, so we are aware of that. But in terms of reviewing that timeline, are you able to confirm that MHCLG and specifically you are involved in that consultation and discussions with Cabinet Office colleagues?



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Alex Norris: Yes. We are having those conversations in great detail. Prior to the machinery of government change, I already had responsibility for local resilience, so that linked to those local resilience forums across the country. There is a broader national resilience review in the context of the findings of this inquiry and in the context of the findings of the covid-19 inquiry. So yes, we have a one-Government approach to this.

I was reaching for my notes, but my understanding of the CCA is that it is refreshed every five years and that the next refresh point would be 2027. I will write to the Committee if that is wrong, but that is my understanding.

Very active conversations are going on. Nevertheless, there are things in the inquiry that we have been able to get on with, particularly in respect of the importance of how local resilience forums and category 1 responders engage with their community and voluntary sector. Again, we know this from the pandemic: when suddenly the chips are down, communities are who you reach out for, because they know people, they have that local sensitivity and they care—all those wonderful things. It is about how you harness that in the future, so that it is not just a case of waiting for something to go really terribly wrong.

Q75 **Chair:** Do you envisage any new burdens from the statutory duty? You mentioned the small voluntary organisations, in terms of category 1 responders. When you take it in the context of the difficulties that many local authorities and groups continue to face with their financial situation—

Alex Norris: I do not think that it is necessarily a new burden; it is as much about wiring the system up much better. I know it from my own town and my own city that these organisations are doing this anyway. There just seems to be that gap with statutory services that disappear immediately the moment there is a problem. Outside of that, we get stuck in, whether it is data or whether it is, “Oh well, these are community groups doing nice-to-have things on the side while the serious work is done by the statutory services.” It was pretty clear in the report and our response to it that we think you could do much better than that. As I say, it is about there being a better link-up and seeing the community as real clear partners in response to crisis, which I think would be a really positive thing.

Q76 **Joe Powell:** We heard from the deputy leader of Kensington and Chelsea about the changes that they have made, specifically around resilience. However, to come back to this theme of oversight, obviously one of the concerns is that within your reporting on gov.uk and the kind of oversight and scrutiny that we have of central Government, as parliamentarians there are fewer tools to do that with a specific local council.

How do you think the oversight of Kensington and Chelsea should be positioned, on resilience, but also on other recommendations that were relevant to them?

Alex Norris: To give you an assurance, Mr Powell, we are very interested in RBKC and its process, as I know you and members of the council are.



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The Deputy Prime Minister has met with the leader, as have I. I meet with the leader monthly; I am meeting them again on Thursday, to see progress.

RBKC were not particularly referenced in part 2 of the report in the way that central Government were, but it is welcome that they are not taking that as a reason to not change. They now have to deliver on that change. The Deputy Prime Minister has been very clear with them that they have a chance to become a model local authority in terms of how they engage with tenants and residents and address their needs, and they need to demonstrate that their culture has changed. I know that they are doing a lot of work on culture. They need to demonstrate that that is working.

The oversight question is a really important one. As a Department, we have our best-value responsibilities. That is a very significant oversight power, as colleagues will know from their own communities. For assurance, we are strongly engaged with RBKC's drive and their culture changes to make sure that the culture really does change. They must deliver on that.

Q77 Chair: We heard in our other evidence session about other respondents working at local level. There are the local authorities, but there are other bodies, including housing associations. In evidence, Edward said that he felt that many housing associations still lacked scrutiny and oversight in terms of their response. What more do you feel that MHCLG could be doing with RSH providers?

Alex Norris: I read very closely what Edward Daffarn said in the previous session. He recognised some of the progress that had been made with the council, but the gap is exactly as you characterise it.

I do not think you can decouple it from the conversation we had at the very start about quality and culture by those social housing organisations. I am a big believer in the maxim of how you do one thing is how you do everything. They have got to demonstrate that they want to listen to tenants, whether that is because they are getting repairs done or they are safeguarding them in the case of an emergency. We need to make sure that tenants have that confidence and those routes to speak up and speak out. That is what we are doing on the Four Million Homes campaign. That answer is very much part of the answer from the beginning.

Q78 Naushabah Khan: We have just heard a little bit about your conversations with RBKC, but the Government have also said that they support the recommendations directed to councils around improving their resilience and training arrangements. How are you going to ensure that councils are able to implement those changes, particularly in terms of additional funding to councils to be able to carry out that expectation, given that a lot of them are already quite stretched on their budgets?

Alex Norris: The finances of resilience is one of those really interesting and never-talked-about issues. If we interrogated *Hansard*, I suspect this might be the first conversation in quite a while on this point.



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For very small amounts of money, we do very big things in this country. It is not just local authorities. It is the commitment of fire and rescue. It is the commitment of the local police. It is the commitment of all those category 1 responders, putting bits of money into the pot.

Having had six or so months at this, my belief is that we need to strengthen capacity. This is really tricky one. I was at the LRF chairs forum in Birmingham a couple of weeks ago, trying to land my desire to put more money in. We are willing to put more money in; we are putting more money into trailblazers shortly, to show some of the best practice in some of the bigger LRFs. But how do you put in central money?

One of the things I am enthusiastic about is a chief resilience officer. At the moment, we are asking the chief constable, generally, or the chief fire officer, to also lead another organisation, an LRF, at the same time as leading the organisation they already lead. In a room, I have no problem with that, because they are those kinds of people. Outside that, how do they do that? I think more professionalised support—a chief resilience officer—is a model that has been effective and can be effective.

However, the anxiety in that is that if we invest in professionalised support, partners will pull away and say, “Actually, that is the job done” with the person who is the permanent member of staff. If we then subcontract all that work to an individual, it will not work. We are trying to find a balance that allows us to get more money, more resource and more capacity into the system in a way that does not lose the magic of the system, which is the ordinary, day-to-day collaboration of category 1 bodies. That keeps us safe at night, which is the challenge. As I say, we have a trailblazer model that is going to help demonstrate best practice. We have some great practice coming out of Greater Manchester and London, and it is about how you scale that, which is very much the exercise we are doing. That feeds into the national resilience review, which was mentioned in an earlier question.

Naushabah Khan: Just so that I am clear, there is some additional funding here to back this up and give councils support to deliver.

Alex Norris: There is for the trailblazer areas. But at the moment, that is where it stops.

Q79 **Naushabah Khan:** Following on from that, obviously we have the conversations around devolution and the role that combined and mayoral authorities will play. What do you see their role being in resilience planning going forward, and what impact do you think the plans around devolution could have on this? Do you think there could be some potential risks and complications down the line when it comes to resilience across local authority working?

Alex Norris: That is such a great question—it is the important question of the day. We are now getting to the point where mayoral authorities in many parts of the country have been well established over a long period of time. Year on year—every May—more come on stream. We are very



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shortly going to get to the point where the entirety of the north of England is covered by such bodies. I do not want to break any rules—I am going stay within Chatham House on this—but it would be safe to say that when I was talking to LRF chairs, there was a degree of anxiety about inserting more politicians into their work. There is good reason why, operationally, we would not. I know that you would engage with your police and fire services in Gillingham, just as I would in Nottingham.

The point I made was that if something bad happens—flooding, wildfire or whatever it is—people will look to their leaders. You cannot say that, in Greater Manchester, they are not going to look to the Mayor of Greater Manchester, successive Mayors of the West Midlands and Kim McGuinness in the north-east, because they are going to do so. That is a fact of life, and it is a good thing. People are looking for leadership from those in whom we have invested a lot of power so that they can have collective leadership, rather than pulling individual levers. My belief is that we have to get them into the room in a way that does not fetter operational challenges but instead means that they can provide that really important link. People can say, “Please put our information out on your really popular social media.” Okay, that is one thing, but it is about having a two-way passage of information so that a voluntary group can say, “Look, we’re trying to get involved and we can’t.” Those Mayors and combined authorities will have a very important role to play, but they are additive; they are not displacing any of the other category 1 partners. I think they add to the process.

Q80 Chair: I want to come back to an area of questioning from my colleague Mr Cocking: fire services. You may be aware that the former Home Affairs Committee wrote to the then Home Secretary about the culture. They had an inquiry on the culture in fire and rescue services across the UK, and the report identified deep-seated problems, including bullying and harassment. This was corroborated in the report published by the inspectorate. Again, you will know that the London Fire Brigade was under special measures and is now out of that. It is a big area that rightly continues to be scrutinised, and the London Fire Commissioner outlined some of the changes within LFB. One of the recommendations, which the Government only accepted in principle, was to have an independent college of fire and rescue services. How do you intend to work with the Home Affairs Committee in looking at addressing the culture in fire and rescue services across the UK, and not just in London?

Alex Norris: First of all, I think that that report, and some of the reporting in the media around culture, brought these issues to the fore. It was a priority for my predecessor, Diana Johnson, including both as Chair of HAC and subsequently as a Minister. Fire services are interesting organisations. We talk about the culture in this building, which is one building with one group of people who are generally on the same work pattern, and then there are obviously people who work in jobs that support that. With fire services, you have multiple watches, so you can have two really great watches with really positive cultures. In the vast majority of cases, that will be case. Then you can have watches that have



poor leadership and a bad culture, and those can exist separately. Detecting and changing that is a challenge.

Similarly, colleagues will be aware that a significant proportion of our firefighting capacity is made up of retained firefighters—people who come when they come on job. How do you set the culture with those people? It is not impossible, but it is a different kind of challenge. So for me, the top three are: culture; the role of the firefighter in the future, because it is now less about chip pans and cigarettes and more about wildfire and flooding; and wider safety issues with regards to firefighters, whether that is about contaminants or kit, and those sorts of things.

On culture particularly, as we committed in the manifesto, we now have a ministerial advisory group, which convenes the fire family to advise the Minister. It is a very reassuring thing to have as a new Minister. A subgroup of that is driving us on culture, and we need to make sure we have those right safeguards, so that people feel that they can speak out and that action is taken properly when they do. That is absolutely critical. For me, as a new Minister, culture will be top of my inbox.

Chair: So there will not be an independent college of fire and rescue?

Alex Norris: Oh, sorry, I totally missed that. No, we accepted that recommendation and we are having an independent college of fire and rescue. That is another thing that we are working with the advisory group on. We still have to decide the kind of form and functions of that, but, yes, very much so; I think it is a great opportunity. It could help us with research, culture and practice, and all sorts of things. It is something that has gone around Governments for the thick end of 25 years, and I think that now is the time to do it. Now is the time to do it.

Q81 **Lewis Cocking:** Fire governance in the UK is quite complicated. You have some areas run by county councils, some by elected mayors, some by police, fire and crime commissioners and some by arm's length bodies. When we go through this process of devolution, what is the Government's view of where fire responsibility should sit at a local level, and are you going to look at making it more consistent across the country?

Alex Norris: This is something that we wrestled with in the "English Devolution" White Paper, and that will follow in the Bill. It is very complicated. If arrangements deliver locally, that is the primary thing, but I do think that there is a responsibility for us, as the national holders of the ring. You cannot keep layering on more and more layers of governance—in this case, mayoral combined authorities—and not have a little look at the structures below. What we have committed to is that, where those boundaries are coterminous, those functions will go to the combined authority, as is one of the models at the moment.

The challenge with the kind of devolution settlement that we have in this country is that not all of those boundaries are coterminous. At the moment, certainly with regards to the English devolution Bill, our intent will stop there. We are having conversations, but there are some areas that do not have coterminosity with their mayoralty and their fire and



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rescue authority, but may have coterminosity with two. It gets harder if there is a little pocket popped into another mayoralty; then, it really does get hard to see how you would change that governance arrangement. So, we are having those conversations about whether you could do something in that situation, but I would not want to commit to that at this point. However, we are going to make it simpler in the English devolution Bill, and I think that is the right thing to do.

Lewis Cocking: When you say “go to the combined authority”, do you mean the combined authority or the elected mayor?

Alex Norris: I mean that the elected mayor will exercise those functions through a statutory deputy.

Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for appearing before us. Like I said, we will continue to look at this really important issue, and, as we do, we will continue to remember the 72 people who sadly lost their lives, and their bereaved family members who continue to fight in their campaign for justice. We thank you for coming before this Select Committee this morning.