

THE TRUTH ABOUT GRENFELL TOWER

A Report by
Architects for Social Housing

On Thursday, 22 June, 2017, in response to the Grenfell Tower fire the previous week, Architects for Social Housing held an open meeting in the Residents Centre of Cotton Gardens estate in Lambeth. An edited film of the meeting, made by Line Nikita Woolfe with the assistance of Luc Beloix on camera and additional footage by Dan Davies, has been produced by her company [Woolfe Vision](#) and may be viewed [here](#). The presentations we gave that evening are the basis of this report, to which we have added our subsequent research as well as that collated from the numerous articles on the Grenfell Tower fire published in the press and elsewhere, to which we have attached the weblinks, with the original documents included whenever they are available.

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Introduction

On the Saturday after the Grenfell Tower fire we ran into a member of the Tenants and Residents Association for Cotton Gardens estate, which includes three 20-storey blocks, and she told us that she had received over 50 calls from residents worried about the safety of their homes. We decided, therefore, to call a meeting on the estate to try and answer their questions and those of residents from other estates alarmed by the reports in the media about the safety of council estate tower blocks, and give them any advice we can on how they can put pressure on their landlords to improve that safety. To do so, we started looking at the causes of the Grenfell Tower fire – not only the technical causes but also the management structures and political decisions that led to them. In addition, we ourselves have been alarmed by the increasingly loud and widespread narrative being spread in the media that council estates are inherently unsafe and that the proper response to this disaster is to demolish all council tower blocks.

As any resident who has been consulted by their local council on the ‘regeneration’ of their estate knows, their responses to seemingly innocuous questions are similarly used to justify the demolition of their homes. As an example of which, one of the questions put to residents of Central Hill estate by Lambeth council at the beginning of their consultation was ‘would you like a new kitchen?’ Two-and-a-half-years later the same council used the answers to these consultations to justify the demolition of the entire estate. In the same way, opinions about living in council tower blocks voiced in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire are not made in a political vacuum. It is entirely understandable that a resident pulled from the hell of the Grenfell Tower fire and shoved in front of a camera crew should call for the demolition of similar tower blocks; it is something very different for a journalist who has never lived on an estate to do the same in a national paper, as it is for a politician who has promoted London’s programme of estate demolition to describe tower blocks as ‘criminally unsafe’ on a news programme watched by millions. This report makes no claim to be the truth about the Grenfell Tower fire, but it is a contribution to the attempt to find it, which also means exposing and refuting the lies being spread about its causes. In trying to find that truth, therefore, we should be aware of the difference between voicing our personal opinions and formulating conclusions based on what we know.

We wanted to use this meeting, therefore, to counter the misperceptions and misinformation being propagated in the media, not only about the Grenfell Tower fire but about the council estate it belongs to, and to begin to organise opposition to the use of this disaster and the hundreds of lives it has claimed to further promote the already widespread programme of estate regeneration that threatens the homes of hundreds of thousands of Londoners. In order to cover these issues in what turned out to be two-and-a-half hours, the meeting was divided into four sections, each with a clear objective: 1) to share what we know collectively about the technical causes of the Grenfell Tower fire; 2) to expose the management structures and political decisions that allowed these

technical conditions to be in place; 3) to advise residents of council tower blocks on the safety or otherwise of their homes, and what changes need to happen in order to stop such a disaster ever happening again; and 4) to organise opposition to the use of the Grenfell Tower fire to promote London's programme of estate demolition. In writing up our presentations, however, we have expanded this report into the six parts outlined in the contents page.

Part 1. Technical Causes of the Grenfell Tower Fire

ASH visited Grenfell Tower on the Thursday after the fire, which started shortly before 1am on Tuesday, 14 June. The neighbouring Silchester estate is under threat of demolition by Kensington and Chelsea council, and we know residents in the campaign who live on Silchester Road, 100 metres north-west of Grenfell Tower. We were therefore able to pass the police cordon and get a close look at the burned-out building. The residents showed us photos of the tower that they had taken from their back garden, and told us that the fire, which began in a fridge-freezer of a flat on the north-east corner of the fourth floor, spread up the corner cladding in a column of flame that reached the roof, twenty floors above, within 15 minutes. It then moved laterally across the cladding in a diagonal line, moving around both sides of the building, meeting at the south-east corner, and eventually encasing the entire tower in flames. [Footage](#) confirming this account was taken by fire-fighters approaching the scene, and the question they ask each other several times in disbelief is: 'How is that possible?'

Grenfell Tower Building Regulations

A building is the sum of its parts, and works holistically. Any changes to its constituent components will therefore alter the fire strategies that are intrinsic to the design of the building. All works to buildings, whether refurbishment or new build, need to pass the 2010 Building Regulations. These regulations are updated regularly, and particularly in response to incidences of fire, which are contained in Approved Document B, which was produced in 2006 and amended in 2010 and 2013. There are several ways that designs get Building Regulations approval from local authorities. 1) The drawings can be sent to the local authority and be approved by their Building Control department as part of a Full Plans application, which generally takes around 8 weeks. 2) Alternatively, it is also possible to submit a Building Notice to the local authority and start construction on site 48 hours after the submission and potentially long before the designs are completed. The difference is, the Full Plans application receives design approval from the council before construction starts, whereas the Building Notice receives a Completion Certificate once the works are completed. In both routes to approval, the building works are inspected throughout construction by an in-house inspector from the council's Building Control department. According to the [Planning Portal](#), with a Building Notice:

'Plans are not required with this process so it's quicker and less detailed than the full plans application. It is designed to enable some types of building work to get under way quickly; although it is perhaps best suited to small work.'

There are also works for which a Building Notice is excluded, including building work which is subject to section 1 of the [Fire Precautions Act 1971](#), for which a certificate issued under this Act by the fire authority is compulsory. Under a Building Notice, the

local authority is simply informed about the works and monitors it as it progresses to ensure the work complies with Building Regulations.

Building Regulations are updated in order to accommodate the use of new technologies, so alterations or additions to existing buildings that, like Grenfell Tower, have been standing for 40 years must first ensure that any work done to that building – whether remedial, cladding or refurbishment – works in conjunction with that building and doesn't compromise the building's existing integrity. This means the fire safety and risk measures need to be re-analysed and the new conditions under which they function taken into account. In the case of Grenfell Tower, the new works appear to have compromised the existing fire safety of the building. In an [interview](#) about the fire, Arnold Tarling, an Associate Director of Hindwoods Chartered Surveyors and a member of the Association for Specialist Fire Protection who has also advised the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group, gave a detailed account of what he thought had happened in the Grenfell Tower fire (illustrated in this BBC diagram below) and why the Building Regulations didn't prevent it happening:

'There was an initial source of fire. That cause is entirely irrelevant to what happened later. What happened is the fire got out of a flat, maybe from an open window or through a broken window from the heat. And then it started heating the panelling and the insulation above [yellow in the diagram below]. That then set a chain reaction, in which the panel started to burn.

'The panels, being aluminium, melt at 600 degrees or thereabouts. But the Fire Brigade cannot put out any of the fires behind these panels, because there's metal there. You also have a wind tunnel effect sucking the flames up between the insulation and the external cladding, melting the solid polyethylene above, and continuing the fire right up the height of the building.

'The cladding system is combined polyaluminum sheets with a filler of polyethylene. And that is what has caused the problems, because the polyethylene melts at a very low temperature and it catches fire. It is basically like a candle which is sandwiched between two sheets of metal.

'The building regulations we have in this country are not fit for purpose with regards to this form of cladding. All that you require to meet the standards is that the outside surface shouldn't allow the spread of flames. What is going on behind the metal or the other surface is entirely irrelevant to Building Regulations.'

This account of the combustion of the cladding panels and insulation was corroborated by [Deputy Superintendent Fiona McCormack](#), who is overseeing the police investigation into the fire. She confirmed that preliminary tests of the insulation samples collected from Grenfell Tower showed they combusted soon after the tests started, and that the

cladding panels also failed the safety tests – with the insulation proving, she said, ‘more flammable than the cladding.’

Close-up photographs of Grenfell Tower after the fire, when both the insulation and the panelling had mostly burnt away, show some of the metal fixings for this cladding system, as seen in the detailed plan below from the manufacturers’, [Arconic](#). In practice, moisture penetration at these points can corrode steel-reinforced concrete structures and considerably shorten the life of the building; and in such instances cladding not only does not fix internal issues, such as the thermal performance of the building, but actually makes them worse, while also creating new problems.

The most lethal of the new problems created by the attachment of cladding to Grenfell Tower was that the panels appear to have circumvented the firestops that were part of the fire safety measures of the original design of the tower. As in all tower blocks, these firestops sub-divided the building into discrete compartments separated by fire-resistant walls, floors and doors which are designed to slow the spread of fire from one compartment to another through their resistance to collapse, the transfer of heat and penetration of fire. Under [Approved Document B \(fire safety\)](#) of Building Regulations 2010 it states:

‘If a fire-separating element is to be effective, then every joint, or imperfection of fit, or opening to allow services to pass through the element, should be adequately protected by sealing or [fire-stopping](#) so that the [fire resistance](#) of the element is not impaired.’

In 2015 the London Fire Brigade was so concerned about the failures of councils to take responsibility for the risks consequent upon refurbished high-rise blocks that it issued all 33 local authorities with an [audit tool](#) to aid them in conducting a risk assessment. According to the [Observer](#), only 2 of London’s 33 councils – Enfield and Kingston upon Thames – confirmed they had applied the audit in full. Part of the London Fire Brigade’s campaign [Know the Plan](#), which was launched in response to their fears that competition to reduce costs had led to the refurbishment of estates being signed off by council’s without adequate scrutiny, the audit states:

‘London Fire Brigade is concerned about the arrangements in place for protecting the fire safety precautions of a building, especially if it has been *refurbished* or if any modification or maintenance projects have been carried out. In the Brigade’s experience, buildings can and do become compromised in fire safety terms by works carried out. These works can be high or poor quality; they might be carried out for very desirable reasons; but sometimes many different types of works can unintentionally damage the fire safety arrangements of a building.’

The question we need to ask, therefore, is how the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower compromised the effectiveness of the firestops to the degree it did, to the extent that fire doors and walls that should have contained the initial fire in the flat in which it started for at least an hour instead allowed the fire to spread up to the roof within 15 minutes and then engulf the entire building within the next 2 hours. [A previous fire](#) in Grenfell Tower that started in a lift lobby in April 2010, long before the refurbishment, was contained within the designed fire compartments without any resulting injuries, let alone loss of life. So what was it that made this fire, seven years later, so deadly?

Grenfell Tower Cladding

In 2016, as part of the refurbishment of the Lancaster West estate to which it belongs, Grenfell Tower was fitted with external cladding. This consisted of three layers:

1. A 150mm-thick layer of Celotex RS5000 thermal insulation (yellow in the diagram above) fixed onto the precast concrete panels (brown in the diagram) and the reinforced concrete frame. We found charred remains of this insulation material lying everywhere around the base of Grenfell Tower, together with the thin foil sheets that covered it. [The Architects' Journal](#) has indicated that in the designs for the cladding this insulation layer had a timber backing. Celotex, which is made from polyisocyanurate (PIR), has a Class 0 fire performance rating, the highest rating a material can get in the Building Regulations. However, as Arnold Tarling said, this rating indicates surface spread, not resistance, and its [Health and Safety Datasheet](#) notes:

‘The products will burn if exposed to a fire of sufficient heat and intensity. As with all organic materials, toxic gases will be released with combustion. Fire fighters should attack the fire according to the combustible materials present, and use breathing apparatus.’

Celotex is manufactured by Saint Gobain UK, and the [Times](#) has revealed that the company’s technical director, Mark Allen, sits on the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, a non-departmental public body that advises Sajid Javid, the Communities and Local Government Secretary, on making Building Regulations and setting standards for the design and construction of buildings. Following the fire Saint Gobain [confirmed](#) that they had supplied Celotex RS5000 for use at Grenfell Tower, and not Celotex FR5000 (FR indicating fire resistant) as had been specified in the August 2012 [Sustainability and Energy Statement](#) that was published as part of the Planning Application by the engineering consultants for the refurbishment, [Max Fordham](#). Saint Gobain has since announced they will be discontinuing the supply of Celotex RS5000 ‘for use in rainscreen cladding systems in buildings over 18 metres tall.’

2. A cavity or gap of 50mm between the first layer of thermal insulation and the cladding panels in order to allow any build up of moisture to evaporate.

3. An outer layer of cladding (grey in the diagram) consisting, on the ground floor columns, of BCM glass reinforced concrete (GRC), then from the mezzanine to the roof of [Reynobond](#) aluminium composite material (ACM) rainscreen cassette panels. This is a sandwich of two coil-coated aluminum sheets, each 0.5mm thick, fusion bonded to a 6mm-thick core, the purpose of which is to give strength and rigidity to the panel. A company director for Omnis Exteriors, the company that supplied the Reynobond panels, has told the [Guardian](#) that the companies that refurbished Grenfell Tower asked them to supply Reynobond PE cladding, which is £2 cheaper per square metre than the alternative Reynobond FR, which stands for 'fire retardant', and which contains a mineral core. The cheaper Reynobond PE contains a polyethylene core, which burns slowly, even after being removed from a flame.

The Principal Designer for the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower was [Studio E Architects](#), which has subsequently removed all information from its webpage on the refurbishment. Before they did so, however, Julian Phillips, an architect with considerable experience of fire safety, took this screen grab of a photograph (above) of the cladding and sent it to ASH. What it clearly shows is that in addition to the 50mm gap between the rain-screen panelling and the insulation, there is a considerably larger void between that and the ten concrete rotated pillars that run up the building, not only creating a series of full-height vertical voids for smoke and flames, but completely bypassing the horizontal fire stops at each floor, thereby rendering them useless. This is confirmed by the plan detail in Studio E's drawings for the cladding (below).

At the four corners of the tower the cladding formed large boxes around the concrete pillars, creating even larger cavities for the heated air, which would account for the fire moving up from the fourth to the twenty-fourth floor in just fifteen minutes. And as Julian Phillips observed, whatever cavity stops there were between the cladding and the concrete wall were only as secure as what they were fixed to – which, given the rapidity with which the fire spread up the cladding, doesn't appear to have been much. On the contrary, it appears that the fire stops at each floor of the tower stopped short at the insulation, and didn't extend into the plane of the rainscreen panels (as illustrated in the [Guardian](#) diagram below).

A further effect of the cladding was that its installation appears to have moved the position of the windows in the tower block outwards, creating a gap between the window frame and the concrete wall through which smoke could pass. In a detailed blog post by technical designer and housing campaigner Ian Abley titled '[Mind the Planning Approved Interface Gap at Grenfell Tower](#)', a photograph (below) reproduced from a [Grenfell Tower Regeneration Newsletter](#) dated August 2014 shows cladding samples in situ. Again, the extent of the void between the cladding and the concrete walls is revealed, but also how far back the existing windows are set as a result.

The concomitant re-positioning of the windows was proposed in changes to the design made by Studio E Architects and planning consultants [IBI Group](#) and accepted by Kensington and Chelsea council planners in January 2015 (application NMA/14/08597). The Studio E drawing (below) shows the existing window position in black, with the proposed window position indicated in red. This meant pulling the windows forward of the original concrete structure. It was proposed that the existing window frame could be retained under the proposed linings, and that the new window could be located within the rainscreen system, attached to the support of the concrete structure on brackets. This created a gap between the new window frame and the existing concrete structure, shown to be partially filled with different insulation to that in the rainscreen panelling.

As Ian Abley warns, this is only a drawing at the planning stage of the refurbishment process, and therefore a snapshot in time; but the planned separation of the windows from the concrete meant that this gap would have been technically critical for the spread of the fire from the initial source in the flat to the cladding:

‘The several materials and products within the interface gap became the only construction stopping a fire inside a flat from reaching the insulated cavity, inside the rainscreen build up, and then the cladding on the outside of the building. If fire got inside the cavity through the interface gap between window and concrete only non-combustible cladding and insulation would resist ignition.

‘If a fire happened in a flat compartment, it is likely too that the window glass would shatter and fall away. Fire could flare through the opening and scorch the cladding externally. The cladding face might resist some spread of flame. But if exposed for long enough only a non-combustible cladding would resist ignition. A flat fire happened.

‘Once inside the rainscreen, having bypassed the window, the fire could spread via variously combustible products. Fire would bypass any cavity fire barriers installed. It would spread upwards and across, from window to window opening. Fire in the cladding and involving the insulation might be able to break back into flats at every level through the same interface gap around the window frames’

Finally, in addition to the cladding, there is also the question of how the fire safety of Grenfell Tower was compromised by the maintenance of its interior – something residents complained about since 2013, long before its external refurbishment in 2016, and to which we will return in Part 4 of this report. This maintenance work – or lack of it – undoubtedly contributed to the spread of the fire internally and the difficulty residents had in escaping from the building; but from our analysis of how the fire spread we believe that it was not the cause of the rapidity with which it engulfed the building, making it impossible for the London Fire Brigade to fight it effectively. Rather, the technical conditions that made the fire in Grenfell Tower so deadly to its inhabitants,

consuming the building with a speed and ferocity which the approaching fire fighters didn't believe was possible, was a direct result of its refurbishment, which not only circumvented the firestops at each floor level, but in addition created a chimney effect between the cladding and the insulation that swept the smoke up the building. Footage of the fire (below) taken by witnesses shows that this chimney effect was strongest in the column cladding running up the building, where the gap between the insulation and the concrete was at its largest. This chimney effect heated up the panelling before setting it on fire and ignited the flammable insulation, which in turn released the hydrogen cyanide that would have overcome most of the inhabitants before the flames reached them. In an interview with the *Architect's Newspaper*, a firefighter from the London Fire Brigade said:

'If the cladding hadn't been there then the fire definitely wouldn't have spread that quickly. Usually, in tower fires, the concrete levels act as a sealed lock to contain the fire, but this has not happened here.'

But if this tells us something about *how* the residents of Grenfell Tower died, it still doesn't tell us *why* it was that this 24-storey tower block in the Notting Barns ward of North Kensington was fitted with a cladding system that architect and fire safety expert Sam Webb described to the *Guardian* as 'a disaster waiting to happen'.

2. Management Decisions responsible for the Grenfell Tower Fire

Grenfell Tower is part of the Lancaster West estate, the rest of which is made up of three 5- and 6-storey finger blocks between which lie landscaped gardens. Before the council took the land away from them to build the new Kensington Aldridge Academy secondary school – for which the refurbishment that killed the residents was offered as a form of compensation – there were several football grounds and other games courts to the north of the tower. When construction was completed in 1974 the original estate would have been a paradise to the tenants fortunate enough to be housed there. And rather than a ghetto for the poor that council estates have subsequently been denigrated as, the community included a mix of social classes. Grenfell Tower was built to [Parker Morris Standards](#), with the top 20 storeys containing 120 flats. Built around a central core containing the lift, staircase and vertical risers for the services, each floor had four 2-bedroom and two 1-bedroom flats, making a total of 200 bedrooms. Communal facilities included a nursery on the first floor (or mezzanine level) and the Dale Youth amateur boxing club, which moved into the ground floor of Grenfell Tower in 2000. As part of its [refurbishment](#) in 2016, both nursery and boxing club were relocated, respectively, to the ground and third floor (or walkway level), and an additional six 4-bedroom and one 3-bedroom flats added on the first and fourth floors. This brought the total number of flats in Grenfell Tower up to 127, and the number of bedrooms to 227.

In an interview in June 2016 with [Constantine Gras](#), an artist who was commissioned by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation to make a film about the refurbishment, Nigel Whitbread, the architect of Grenfell Tower, said of its original construction:

‘Ronan Point, the tower that partially collapsed in 1968, had been built like a pack of cards. Grenfell Tower was a totally different form of construction, and from what I can see could last another 100 years. I’m very much against knocking things down unnecessarily. I had heard that there had been problems a few years ago with the heating and that it was no good, and talk of the whole block having to come down. And I thought: if my heating goes wrong, I don’t want to pull my house down!’

Grenfell Tower Management

In 1996 the entire council housing stock of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was transferred to the [Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation](#) (KCTMO), which currently manages 9,459 properties, of which around 6,900 are tenant-occupied and 2,500 leasehold properties, and from which it collects £44 million in rent and £10 million in service charges every year. The KCTMO is unique in also being an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), which means that activities between it and the council are viewed by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs as non-trading

activity, so any profit arising from it will not be taxable. KCTMO has a board which at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire comprised eight residents, three council-appointed members and two independent members. Their identities have now been removed from the company website, but at the time of the fire they included:

- [Fay Edward](#), the Chair and Resident Board Member since 2012 and recipient in the Queen's New Year's Honours List 2015 of the British Empire Medal. It was she who awarded the contract for the fatal refurbishment of Grenfell Tower;
- Conservative councillor Maighread Condon-Simmonds, the Lady Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea until May 2017;
- Labour councillor [Judith Blakeman](#), who sits on the council's Housing and Property scrutiny committee, and who in December 2015 dismissed calls by the Grenfell Action Group to investigate the KCTMO;
- Council-nominated Board Member Paula France, a former employee at the government's Homes and Communities Agency who has held senior positions in Circle, Thirty Three, Look Ahead, Network Housing and Shepherd's Bush housing associations and now runs her own consultancy business;
- Independent Board Member Simon Brissenden, a Management Consulting Professional who until March of this year was employed to deliver Health and Safety Compliance in the Asset and Investment portfolio for Genesis Housing Association;
- Independent Board Member Anthony Preiskel, since 2012 a Non-Executive Director of the government's Homes and Communities Agency.

The KCTMO is not a co-operative, which means that although it was created under the government's Housing (Right to Manage) Regulations 1994, it was set up under corporate law. And although the housing stock it manages is still owned by the council, as an ALMO (the only UK TMO, apparently, that is also an ALMO) it is exempt from Freedom of Information requests (not that councils answer these either, or when they do the information requested is redacted). The distinction between public and private means very little these days, and one look at who sits on this board shows that it's run by housing professionals fronted by politicians with the acquiescence of compliant residents – in other words, the same privatised management structure being put in place for every other estate regeneration scheme in London.

Grenfell Tower Refurbishment

As this diagram from the *Guardian* illustrates (below), [Artelia UK](#), which specialises in cost management, was contracted by KCTMO to be project managers on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, which was carried out in 2016. On its website page on residential services, Artelia says that it 'works closely with our clients to understand what success looks like to them and how we can make that success a reality'; and among its past experiences lists 'refurbishment projects for local authorities.' On its page on Health and

Safety Management Artelia says it's management results in a 'safer, better, more cost-effective project.' And on its page on Design and Construction Management Artelia says 'we take full responsibility for architects, engineers, contractors and suppliers in a seamless process that drives out inefficiencies.' Again, it cites its experience in working on programmes 'where continuous reduction in construction costs is considered a non-negotiable contract deliverable.' On the page describing its 'involvement in the Grenfell Tower refurbishment project' Artelia says that it was appointed as the 'Employer's Agent, Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Co-ordinator and Quantity Surveyor.' Artelia describes the Grenfell Tower fire as a 'tragic event.'

On the [Designing Buildings Wiki](#) page it says that the Construction, Design and Management Co-ordinator (CDM) role is to:

- 'Advise the client on matters relating to health and safety during the design process and during the planning phases of construction.'
- 'Notify the health and safety executive of the particulars specified in schedule 1 of the regulations.'
- 'Advise the client as to the adequacy of resources.'
- 'Co-ordinate health and safety aspects of design work.'
- 'Advise on the suitability, co-ordination and compatibility of design in relation to health and safety.'
- 'Advise on the adequacy of the construction phase plan before construction works begin.'
- 'Advise on the adequacy of any subsequent changes to the construction phase plan.'
- 'Prepare or compile the health and safety file and issue it to the client at the end of the construction phase.'

So far, therefore, Artelia seems to be the company responsible for the health and safety of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, its design, planning, compatibility with the existing building, construction and materials used.

However, on 6 April 2015, the year before the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower began, the Construction, Design and Management Regulations were changed, with the role of the CDM Co-ordinator transferred to a Principal Designer, which is responsible for the pre-construction phase, and a Principal Contractor, which is responsible for the construction phase. Under the new CDM regulations the client, which in this project was Kensington and Chelsea TMO, is responsible for 'ensuring that both the Principle Designer and Contractor are complying with their duties, and for making Health and Safety Executive notification.' However, as an article on these changes published in the [Architects' Journal](#) observes: 'this may be difficult where the principal designer has no direct contractual authority over [the other designers].' In effect, the article concludes, the role of the CDM Co-ordinator has been abolished. As Quantity Surveyor for the

project, therefore, Artelia was responsible not for ensuring Health and Safety regulations were met in the refurbishment, but for reducing the costs of refurbishment. The Principal Designer and Principal Contractor on the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower were, respectively, Studio E Architects and Rydon, a construction, development, maintenance and management group. In response to the Grenfell Tower fire, [Studio E Architects](#), which as we said has removed its webpage on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, has written that it will be 'ready to assist the relevant authorities as and when we are required.' Despite the fatal design fault which, as we have seen, effectively turned the cladding into a vast chimney for the flames, Studio E also describes the Grenfell Tower fire as a 'tragic incident.' [Rydon](#), which also describes the fire as a 'tragedy', has also removed its webpage on the refurbishment, and replaced it with a statement about Grenfell Tower saying:

'Rydon Maintenance Limited completed a partial refurbishment of the building in the summer of 2016 for KCTMO on behalf of the Council, which met all required building regulations – as well as fire regulation and health and safety standards – and handover took place when completion notice was issued by Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea building control.'

This Completion Certificate for the refurbishment work on Grenfell Tower, issued on 17 July, 2016 by John Allen, the Kensington and Chelsea Building Control Manager, reads:

'The Council hereby certifies under Regulation 17 that as far as could be ascertained, after taking all reasonable steps, the building work carried out complied with the relevant provisions. This certificate is evidence, but not conclusive evidence, that the relevant requirements specified below [Schedule 1] have been complied with.'

This is equivocal enough. But the Kensington and Chelsea council website page on the refurbishment work to Grenfell Tower (application FP/14/03563) also lists the status as: '[Completed Not approved](#)'. No date is given for this decision. However, in an '[Important Update](#)' to this page, the council adds this addendum:

'People searching for application FP/14/03563 please note that the status "Completed Not approved" *does not* mean that the work was not approved under the Building Regulations. The formal signing off of the work was provided by a Completion Certificate and not by a Full Plans decision notice, *which was not required in this case*. The system status "Not approved" appears because a decision notice was not issued. However, a completion certificate was issued signing off the works under the Building Regulations.'

So, who is responsible for fitting Grenfell Tower with flammable insulation and a combustible cladding system that acted as a chimney for the fire?

Grenfell Tower Responsibilities

In response to the Grenfell Tower fire, ASH received several e-mails from a senior architect who wishes to remain anonymous, but who gave us permission to publish his comments, which we include at length here:

'If, as has been reported in the [Guardian](#), the design of the cladding was different to that which was detailed in planning documents, were the architects (Studio E), in charge of the refurbishment works under a traditional building contract? That is unlikely. In the climate of Private Finance Initiative design-and-build contracts, the architects are engaged only to add gloss to the project marketing – to raise the Right-to-Buy value of the property under the coinage of “architect designed”. If the architects were not in charge of enforcing compliance with contract specifications, then they would have been cut to the bone by the contractor to maximise every penny of profit. PFI contracts are bought and sold on the open market like any other commodity.

'Regardless of the route to compliance with Building Regulations, on completion of the works the conformance authority, in this case Kensington and Chelsea Building Control, must issue a Completion Certificate, without which the refurbished building cannot be insured – for example, for fire.

A further e-mail continued:

'There are two things here: 1. The insulation fixed over the existing external walls; and 2. The cladding fixed on top of that, with a gap between the two. The cladding has a material which is the sandwich fill between the two layers of thin aluminium. If we are talking about the second issue, the cladding, no one in their right mind would specify the combustible type, partly because of case law, where architects who did specify that lost their defence at appeal in the High Court in 2003. You might as well clad the building in ten-pound notes dipped in Napalm.

'The Principal Designer (in this case Studio E Architects) would normally seek written advice from the supplier – with a quote for supply – that the material is fit for purpose. In this case it is inconceivable that the manufacturer of Reynobond (Arconic Europe) would not recommend their “A2 Fire Solution”, comprising an incombustible sandwich core that conforms with European fire certification EN 13501-1, class A2.

'However, in PFI and design-build projects, the designer is not in charge of the job. Instead, an unregulated yes-man, or yes-woman, is employed to deliver the project. The contractor (in this case Rydon) submits a price, and the public employer (in this case KCTMO) will select the lowest in the interest of the public

purse. The contractor (Rydon) has in mind ways to cut costs to maximise profit on tight margins, while the designer (Studio E Architects) wants to protect the quality of the build. So the procurement process can be adversarial.

'The local authority (Kensington and Chelsea council) has a statutory role to inspect and approve that the materials and construction conform to regulations. Frequently, these days, private firms can do this, and are generally better and more efficient than a local authority. In the case of Grenfell Tower the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Building Control were responsible, but the contractor chose not to submit Full Plans of construction details for approval; rather, they relied on site inspections – presumably in order to accelerate the project, but, one might argue, also in order to avoid having to commit construction details and material specifications documentation to the record.

'Because of the nature and scale of the project, it is unusual for the Building Control department to accept Building Notice at all. It would have been better had they insisted on Full Plans submission, especially because there were architectural drawings available. So there is a question that points to a “chemistry” between the contractor and the Building Control department.

'Around the world – for example, in France – it is mandatory to have a registered architect and/or Maitre d'ouvres, or Architect of Record, in charge of all construction projects over a minimum threshold size of 70m². In Britain that isn't the case. The perception is that an architect's appointment adds onerous unnecessary cost, so the delivery of the building works is reliant on the trust and integrity of the builder, and on effective Building Control site inspection that what is carried out is compliant. In this case, and countless others procured under Private Finance Initiative terms, that failed.

'Since PFI was introduced by Thatcher we have a legacy of hundreds, if not thousands, of sub-standard buildings – schools, hospitals, police stations, etc – that the taxpayer is still paying extortionate rents for under the terms of the 30-year lease-back deal that is PFI. This is her legacy of cosy relationships between local authorities, quangos and their chummy contractors. It is a culture of deregulation, of private profit before public good. Thomas Dan Smith, the Leader of Newcastle City Council from 1960 to 1965, went to gaol in 1974 for dodgy dealings with local authorities in property development, albeit from a different motivation; but what the public must demand and get now over the Grenfell Tower fire are criminal convictions, and soon.'

3. Political Context for the Grenfell Tower Fire

So much for those responsible for the deadly refurbishment of Grenfell Tower; but why was it deemed necessary to clad the tower in the first place and who made that decision?

Grenfell Tower Regeneration

In February 2009, eight years before the Grenfell Tower fire, Urban Initiatives Studio, a practice specialising in urban design, planning and change management, was appointed by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to create a masterplan for the regeneration of Notting Barns South, an 18 hectare site in North Kensington containing the Silchester and Lancaster West estates, including Grenfell Tower. 6 months later they produced *Notting Barns South: Draft Final Masterplan Report*, which included the following observations and recommendations, beginning with this Executive Summary: 'The area suffers from housing stock in need of ongoing and expensive refurbishment, a range of social deprivation and other issues often associated with large post-war housing estates. This context means that land values are artificially depressed closer to the centre. The Far-sighted Option aims to maximise overall value in the long term and create a high quality new neighbourhood. This requires a number of significant interventions. We estimate that the project could deliver significant returns to the council. In order to present the most attractive offer in a competitive bidding process the winning consortium would need to adopt the most optimistic approach to cost and/or values.'

To back up the necessity of the council adopting their proposals, the report also addresses what it calls Issues and Opportunities, the former of which include the following:

'Although a diverse population in terms of age, ethnic and religious backgrounds, the area is limited in terms of its economic profile and is predominantly made up of social housing tenants. The ward of Notting Barns South suffers substantial issues of deprivation relating to employment, health and crime, however, the intensity of deprivation varies. The Lancaster West estate (east) is within the 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country, and similarly crime is more severe in the east of the study area.'

Now, in fact, as shown by these two screen grabs (below) from the [Indices of Deprivation 2015](#) interactive map, although Lancaster West estate does lie within the 10 per cent most deprived areas (left), its crime rates are shared by 40 per cent of areas (right), and is in fact far lower than in surrounding areas where terraced housing predominates. This accords with the figures on every estate ASH has researched, from Broadwater Farm to Aylesbury and Central Hill. Behind the unsubstantiated and easily-accepted assertions of reports like this one, crime levels on council estates are in fact

consistently lower than in the surrounding area, contradicting everything we are told about council estates and their communities by terrace-dwelling journalists and developer-lobbied politicians. Not only are estates not 'breeding grounds' for crime, as they are characterised in both Fleet Street and Westminster, but the close-knit communities that form within them significantly reduce crime rates. As in just about everything else being said about council estates in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, estates as homes to anti-social behaviour, crime and drug dealing is another myth that is being used by architects, developers, councils, journalists and politicians to promote estate demolition, privatisation and redevelopment.

In the Urban Initiatives report, particular attention is given to the development options on the towers in the area, starting with the four 22-storey towers on the Silchester estate:

'It would be very challenging for the scheme to reprovide this number of homes should they be demolished. Therefore our preferred approach is to assume retention and refurbishment. In certain cases it may be possible to transfer these towers to private sector developers to provide private sale or rent units.'

Grenfell Tower, by contrast, has no such reprieve:

'We considered that the appearance of this building and the way in which it meets the ground *blights* much of the area east of Latimer Road Station. It also provides no outdoor space for residents and is likely to be of a type of construction that is hard to adapt. It does contain 120 homes. On balance our preferred approach is to assume demolition.'

The report goes on to outline the Phasing and Delivery of the proposed 15-20-year masterplan, from which we have extracted the following:

Phase 1. 'Includes the construction of the new school immediately to the east of the railway line on the existing Games Court and Kensington Sports car park. Adjacent to the station two private 12-storey towers are erected.'

Phase 2. 'East of the railway the eastern part of Lancaster West is demolished together with Grenfell Tower. This building *blights* the area, provides no outdoor space for residents and is difficult to refurbish. The remainder of Lancaster, which is being refurbished, is completed into a closed street block with infill development. By the end of this phase the regeneration of the Silchester and Lancaster area is almost complete.'

Citing the area as providing no outdoor space for residents as a justification for the demolition of Grenfell Tower in Phase 2 is ironic at best given that Phase 1 began with

building the [Kensington Aldrige Academy](#) – which was also designed by Studio E Architects – on that outdoor space, thereby taking it away from residents; but like the stereotypes about crime in the area this doesn't halt the concluding phases, when the 'Far-sighted Option' that aims to 'maximise the overall value' of the area comes into its own:

Phase 3. 'This phase realises a large proportion of high-end, high-value market housing.'

Phase 4. 'New housing can benefit from the proximity to and overlooking of the park, and market housing is expected to realise increased values.'

Phase 5. 'During this phase 610 units are developed or refurbished with a high percentage of private units.'

All of which leads the authors of this report, Matthias Wunderlich, Stuart Gray and Dan Hill, to the following conclusions:

'The farsighted option for the masterplan presented within this report has the potential to transform the social and physical characteristics of Notting Barns in a positive manner. Because of the existing tenure mix and the decline of Right to Buy, the estate will never become a more mixed and integrated community. This work shows how sensitive the potential residual land values are to residential sale values and, in particular, to the potential values for high end flats and houses. To achieve the highest values, the area will need to undergo significant change to improve its *visual appearance*.'

Grenfell Tower Appearance

Following the financial crash, house prices in London in 2009 had fallen for the first time in decades; and presumably for this reason, which may have dissuaded development partners, Kensington and Chelsea council declined the 'Far-sighted Option' (above) and chose, instead, what the report called the 'Early Value Option' (below). In its broad outlines this is the masterplan which, [updated](#) in May 2016 by CBRE building consultancy, continues to threaten the residents of the Silchester estate with the demolition and redevelopment of their homes – the most recent [plans](#) for which were exhibited in April 2017 – and has already built the Academy on the playing fields, but which also refurbished Lancaster West estate, including Grenfell Tower. The reason for doing so, however, had not changed from that which targeted it for demolition as a 'blight' on the area – that is, its appearance.

The 2014 [planning application](#) (ref. PP/12/04097/Q18) for the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower reads:

'The materials proposed will provide the building with a fresh *appearance* that will not be harmful to the area or views around it. Due to its height the tower is visible from the adjacent Avondale Conservation Area to the south and the Ladbroke Conservation Area to the east. The changes to the existing tower will improve its *appearance* especially when viewed from the surrounding area. Therefore views into and out of the conservation areas will be improved by the proposals.'

The planning considerations listed include: 'The impact of the works on the *appearance* of the building and area, and views from the adjacent conservation area.' The materials used on the external faces of the building used were chosen 'To accord with the development plan by ensuring that the character and *appearance* of the area are preserved and living conditions of those living near the development suitably protected'. While the windows and doors were chosen 'To ensure the *appearance* of the development is satisfactory. The re-clad materials and new windows will represent a significant improvement to the environmental performance of the building and to its physical *appearance*.' The application concludes: 'The changes to the external *appearance* of the building will also provide positive enhancements to the *appearance* of the area.'

On the [webpage](#) (now removed from their site) where Grenfell Tower was listed as a case study, Rydon wrote: 'Rain screen cladding, replacement windows and curtain wall façades have been fitted giving the building a fresher, modern *look*.' And Nicholas Paget-Brown, the now ex-Leader of Kensington and Chelsea Conservative council, is quoted on the council [webpage](#) on the refurbishment as saying: 'It is remarkable to see first-hand how the cladding has lifted the external *appearance* of the tower.'

Studio E Architects' webpage on Grenfell Tower – again, sent to us by an architect before it was taken down – shows an artists' impression (below) for the client of what the refurbishment would look like, complete with the white, middle class residents drawn to attract investors into the area, and who are so at odds with the racial and class demographic of the tower revealed by the hundreds of photographs of missing residents put up around the burnt out carcass of the building by families and friends. This is the external view of the Grenfell Tower for which the people who lived inside the building died.

Grenfell Tower Profits

Nicholas Paget-Brown became the Leader of Kensington and Chelsea Conservative council in May 2013, when residents of Grenfell Tower first began complaining about fire safety in their block. He has been a councillor in the borough since 1986, and previously occupied the position of Cabinet Member for Community Safety,

Regeneration and the Voluntary Sector, in which capacity he was responsible for driving a range of capital investment projects in North Kensington. A former City marketing manager for the international news agency Reuters, Paget-Brown is currently Managing Director at Pelham Research, which analyses government policy and offers management briefings on public policy for businesses and local authorities.

The Deputy Leader of the council, also appointed in May 2013, as well as Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Regeneration, is Rock Feilding-Mellen, who owns a £1.2 million 3-storey townhouse in the ward. Having lost the St. Charles ward, where he had been councillor since 2006, Feilding-Mellen was parachuted into the Holland ward in 2010. He was subsequently made Cabinet Member for Civil Society, which meant he was responsible for the council's policies on community safety, economic development, the voluntary sector and community engagement. Until becoming Deputy Leader, Feilding-Mellen also sat on the Major Planning Development Committee. In addition to his responsibilities on the Kensington and Chelsea council, Feilding-Mellen is also the Leader's Committee Deputy, Lead Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, Lead Member for Housing, and Lead Member for Employment and Skills for London Councils, the cross-party local government association, think-tank and lobbyist for Greater London. He is also a member of the Greater London Assembly. In his spare time Feilding-Mellen is also the Director of [property developers](#) Socially Conscious Capital Ltd, Director of SCC Longniddry Ltd, Director of Vilnius Investment Management Ltd, and Director of UAB May Fair Investments, a real estate company registered in Lithuania.

In 2016 both Nicholas Paget-Brown and Rock Feilding-Mellen attended MIPIM, the world's leading international fair for property professionals in Cannes, where London councils – among other landlords – agree deals with property developers for the land on which residents in their boroughs are still living. In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, both Paget-Brown and Feilding-Mellen have resigned from their Cabinet positions, although not as councillors, the former saying in his [resignation statement](#) that he has to 'accept my share of responsibility for these *perceived* failings'. Both men described the Grenfell Tower fire as a 'tragedy'.

Nicholas Holgate was appointed Chief Executive and Town Clerk of Kensington and Chelsea council in December 2014. A career public servant who was previously Chief Operating Officer at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Holgate joined the borough in 2008 as Executive Director for Finance, Information Systems and Property. In 2016-17 Holgate's salary was £187,780, with a bonus of between 3 and 10 per cent based on performance. For this he was expected to work 4½ days per week. In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire Holgate was compelled to resign by Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. However, the [Daily Telegraph](#) has reported that Holgate will be entitled to compensation for losing his job, understood to be equivalent to at least six months' pay, or around £100,000.

Robert Black, a former Executive Director of Services at Circle Housing Group, was appointed Chief Executive of the Kensington and Chelsea TMO in 2009. He too has resigned in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire – according to an announcement by the KCTMO board, ‘in order that he can concentrate on assisting with the investigation and inquiry.’ Together with Barbara Matthews, the Executive Director of Financial Services and Information and Communication Technology, Yvonne Birch, Executive Director of People and Performance, and Sacha Jevans, Executive Director of Operations, Black was part of a team of ‘key management personnel’ which, according to the latest accounts filed by the KCTMO with [Companies House](#), collectively earned £760,000 last year. In [accounts](#) for the financial year ending March 2016, KCTMO’s income was £4.42 million, with a turnover just over £17.6 million.

[The Times](#) has reported that documents from June and July 2014 reveal that KCTMO sent an ‘urgent nudge e-mail’ to Artelia UK, the project managers on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, saying that they had a meeting the next morning with Councillor Feilding-Mellen, who was overseeing the refurbishment. The e-mail reads: ‘I have been reminded that we need good costs for Cllr Feilding-Mellen and the planner tomorrow at 8.45am!’ The e-mail went on to list three options for reducing the cost of cladding. One of these was to use panels made of combustible and flammable aluminium with a polyethylene core rather than a non-combustible zinc with a mineral-rich fire-retardant core that was proposed by Studio E Architects and approved by residents in 2012. This swap, which was made after tender, could mean, the e-mail says, ‘a saving of £293,368’. Asked about these e-mails, Artelia responded that it is ‘bound by a duty of confidentiality in its contract with KCTMO.’

According to a report in the [Guardian](#), the BCM glass reinforced concrete (GRC) panels that were used to clad the columns on the ground floor of Grenfell Tower have the highest fire rating of A1, and have been used on luxury apartment complexes, including high rises. However, industry sources said glass reinforced concrete panels cost around twice as much as the polyethylene aluminium panels used on the rest of the building, and would have increased the refurbishment costs by at least £1 million.

The Reynobond PE panels used on Grenfell Tower are prohibited on high-rise buildings in the USA and, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government, also breach the UK’s Building Regulations 2010, which restrict their use on buildings over 18 metres tall. Arconic, the company that manufactures Reynobond PE, has published guidelines warning that the PE cladding is unsuitable for buildings above 10 metres tall, and even the FR cladding is only suitable up to 30 metres, after which it advises that the non-combustible A2 model should be used. Despite this, e-mails obtained by [Reuters](#) show that in July 2014 Deborah French, Arconic’s UK sales manager, and executives at the contractors involved in the bidding process for the refurbishment contract, were involved in discussions about the use of cladding on Grenfell Tower, which is 60 metres tall. Asked about these e-mails, Arconic, which has

since discontinued the sale of Reynobond PE on high-rise buildings, replied that ‘it was not its role to decide what was or was not compliant with local building regulations.’ In its 2016 brochure on [‘Fire safety in high-rise buildings’](#), Arconic warned:

‘When conceiving a building, it is crucial to choose the adapted products in order to avoid the fire to spread (*sic*) to the whole building. Especially when it comes to facades and roofs, the fire can spread extremely rapidly.’

The reductions in cladding costs were among savings of £693,000 required by the Principal Contractor, Rydon, which won the contract in June 2014 by undercutting estimates from the original contractor. The Leadbitter Group had estimated the project in 2012 at a cost of £11.3m, considerably higher than Kensington and Chelsea council’s target budget of £9.7 million. Rydon offered to do the refurbishment for £8.7 million, and were awarded the contract, according to a [report](#) by Kensington and Chelsea’s housing and property scrutiny committee, following a ‘value engineering process’. Last year Rydon made a [pre-tax profit](#) of £14.3 million on revenues of £271 million, and paid investors a dividend of £2 million, the largest slice of which went to Rydon’s Chief Executive and largest shareholder, Robert Bond, who also earned a salary of £424,000, a pay rise from £392,000 the year before.

In 2015 Harley Curtain Wall won the £2.6 million contract from Rydon to install the Reynobond PE panels. But after being pursued for almost £2.5 million by HM Revenue & Customs for involvement in alleged tax-avoidance schemes the company went into administration later that year, before the work had been completed. However, Managing Director Ray Bailey was allowed to purchase his old business for just £24,900 and continue trading under the new name of Harley Facades. The company has since removed all details about the contract from their [website](#) ‘as a mark of respect to the people of Grenfell Tower.’

At the time of the fire, Kensington and Chelsea Conservative council had £283 million in its reserves – although it has since claimed that the Housing Revenue Account, whose management is delegated to the KCTMO, only contained £21 million. This didn’t stop the council from offering rebates to borough residents who were paying the top rate of council tax. According to figures released under the Freedom of Information Act and published in the [Observer](#), as of spring 2016 the Conservative council has moved 1,668 homeless households living in temporary housing outside the borough – the joint highest figure in England alongside fellow London council Newham, which is Labour-run. Of those households, 902 had been ‘temporarily’ rehoused outside Kensington and Chelsea borough for at least a year – the second highest such figure in the country. Hundreds more have been sent to outer London boroughs such as Barking and Redbridge, or outside London altogether, to Kent and Essex. The latest figures for Kensington and Chelsea council reveal that, as of March 2017, the council only has [433 properties for let](#) in a borough with around [1,000 homeless households](#) living in

temporary accommodation. It also had [2,677 households](#) on the housing waiting list in 2014, a drop from [8,493 households](#) just a year earlier. This reduction, which is representative of London councils, follows the introduction of the [2011 Localism Act](#), which radically changed both the criteria by which households qualify for council housing and the duty of care the council has to house them. A survey by [Inside Housing](#) in March 2016 found that, since the Localism Act came into effect in June 2012, 159 English councils had struck 237,793 people off their waiting lists and barred a further 42,994 new applicants. Meanwhile, a BBC [report](#) has revealed that, under [Section 106 agreements](#), Kensington and Chelsea council accepted £47.3 million from developers in lieu of affordable housing in 2016 alone, with just 336 affordable units having been built in the borough since 2011.

In contrast to this demand for housing, the failure to build it, and the relocation of homeless households outside the borough, the latest figures for Kensington and Chelsea reveal that, as of April 2017, there are [1,399 vacant private dwellings](#) in the borough. In a [report](#) published by the council's Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee in July 2015, it was found that of the 941 dwellings then classified as unoccupied – two-thirds the current number only two years ago – around 50 had stood empty for between 11 and 15 years. And as shown by *Private Eye's* [interactive map](#) of properties in England and Wales acquired by overseas companies between 2005 and 2014, most of these are registered to companies based in tax havens like the Virgin Islands.

There was nothing wrong with either the original design or build of Grenfell Tower. Four decades of developer-led housing policy, government cuts to local authority budgets, the financialisation of housing in the UK, the managed decline of our estates by councils preparatory to their demolition and redevelopment as properties for capital investment, the privatisation of council housing management through ALMOs, TMOs and the stock transfer of council estates to housing associations, the unaccountability of local authorities increasingly run as private fiefdoms by councillors who are little more than lobbyists for the building industry, and the recourse to Private Finance Initiatives to build housing whose safety is subordinate to the profits of developers, builders, architects and estate agents getting rich on the UK's housing crisis – that's what killed the residents of Grenfell Tower, not its architecture.

4. The Fire Safety of Council Tower Blocks

Out of the 600 tower blocks over 18 metres tall and fitted with cladding that are undergoing tests in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, 181 council-owned blocks in 51 local authorities across England have failed to meet the necessary standard of fire resistance as of 2 July, with a 100 per cent failure rate on those tested. In London alone this number includes 3 tower blocks in the borough of Barnet, 2 in Brent, 5 in Camden, 1 each in Hounslow, Islington and Lambeth, 2 in Lewisham, 3 in Newham, 2 in Tower Hamlets and 2 in Wandsworth, a total of 22 tower blocks so far. Even then the tests, which are being carried out by the [Building Research Establishment](#) on behalf of the Department of Communities and Local Government, have been [criticised](#) for undertaking combustibility tests on the aluminium composite material in the rainscreen panels, while experts have warned that what determines how a fire spreads is the cladding support system, the insulation it protects, and the fire breaks in the cavity. What requires testing, therefore, is not only the combustibility of the various component materials, but how they respond to fire within the cladding system. In response to these criticisms, the government set up an independent [Expert Advisory Panel](#) that has advised the BRE to conduct 6 fire tests on 3 different cladding systems, comprising core filler materials of unmodified polyethylene, fire retardant polyethylene, and non-combustible mineral wool, each in combination with 2 different types of insulation, polyisocyanurate foam and non-combustible mineral wool. Potentially and probably, therefore, the number of tower blocks whose fire safety has been compromised by the addition of cladding to their exterior may be even higher. And there are fears that the tests will have to extend beyond the public sector into private tower blocks, as well as including universities, hospitals and care centres fitted with cladding. So how could such a widespread compromise of UK building fire safety have been allowed to happen?

Grenfell Tower Precedents

In July 2009 a fire started on the 9th floor of Lakanal House, a 14-storey block on the Sceaux Gardens estate in Camberwell, and quickly spread up 5 more floors of the building, killing 6 people. It later emerged that the block, which had been refurbished by Southwark council, had been fitted with a similar rainscreen cladding system as that which was later applied to Grenfell Tower by Kensington and Chelsea council. [The 2013 inquest](#) into the fire concluded that years of botched renovations had removed fire-stopping material between flats and communal corridors, and that this allowed the fire, which as in Grenfell Tower had started with an electrical fault, to spread both vertically and laterally, with the exterior cladding panels burning through in just four and a half minutes. A change in the law in 2006 meant Southwark council was responsible for fire safety checks in its flats, but by the time of the fire, 3 years later, the council had not carried out these checks at Lakanal House or any other residential block. This didn't stop the council, however, from managing to carry out fire-safety checks at buildings where its own staff worked. In February of this year, at [Southwark Crown Court](#), Southwark

council, for its culpability in the safety failings at Lakanal House, was issued with a £270,000 fine (reduced from £400,000 because it had pleaded guilty) plus £300,000 costs – exactly £9,500 for every resident killed in the fire. Nobody was convicted.

Following the Lakanal House fire the [coroner's report](#), which was sent to the Department of Communities and Local Government in March 2013, made a series of recommendations to the government, including that the Department provide national guidance to:

- 'The "stay put" principle and its interaction with the "get out and stay out" policy, including how such guidance is disseminated to residents.'
- 'Awareness that insecure compartmentalisation can permit transfer of smoke and fire between a flat or maisonette and common parts of high-rise residential buildings, which has the potential to put at risk the lives of residents or others.'
- 'Encourage providers of housing in high-rise residential buildings containing multiple domestic premises to consider the retro fitting of sprinkler systems.'
- 'Provide clear guidance in relation to Regulation B4 of the Building Regulations, with particular regard to the spread of fire over the *external envelope of the building* and the circumstances in which attention should be paid to *whether proposed work might reduce existing fire protection*.'

In his [response](#) to the coroner's report, Conservative MP Eric Pickles, then the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, wrote that following the Lakanal House fire and deaths, in 2011 his Department had published detailed national guidance that: 'Takes a practical approach to ensuring that those responsible for the safety of residents and others in purpose built blocks can take a comprehensive and pragmatic approach to managing risk effectively within the context of the Housing Act 2004 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. It addresses in some detail the rationale for the stay-put principle and provides detailed advice on the fire safety information that should be made available to residents in the light of the findings of a risk assessment.'

None of this guidance, therefore, took account of the recommendations of the Coroner's Report published in 2013. To the coroner's recommendation that sprinklers be retro-fitted in high-rise residential buildings, Pickles responded that: 'My officials have recently written to all social housing providers about this.' And on providing guidance on Approved Document B (fire safety) of Building Regulations with regard to how external cladding can reduce existing fire protection he wrote:

'The design of fire protection in buildings is a complex subject and should remain, to some extent, in the realm of professionals. We have commissioned research which will feed into a future review of this part of the Building Regulations. We expect this work to form the basis of a formal review leading to the publication of a new edition of the Approved Document in 2016/17.'

An article in [Construction News](#) has revealed that in January 2012 a final impact assessment, titled [Removing inconsistency in local fire protection standards](#), was published by Stephen Kelly, who was subsequently appointed Chief Operating Officer for Government and Head of the Efficiency and Reform Group, and Brian Martin, the Principal Construction Professional in the Building Regulations and Standards Division at the Department of Communities and Local Government, that recommended repealing 23 local building acts across England. Signed off by Andrew Stunell, then the Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for the DCLG and now House of Lords construction spokesperson, this document argued that the repeal of the acts was an 'appropriate deregulatory measure that reduces procedural and financial burdens on the construction industry'. The assessment estimated that over a 35-year period, between £116,334 and £357,400 of capital savings could be achieved by not installing or maintaining sprinklers in tall buildings, and between £195,300 and £600,000 could be saved from not installing smoke extractors. In addition, it estimated that sprinkler maintenance could cost between £300 and £800 per building, and that implementing safety measures held within the local acts would add up to £1.1 million to the costs of a building over a 35-year period. Based on figures sourced from the Home Office on fire incidents between 1994 and 1999, and drawing on statistical research from a report published in 2005 by the Building Research Establishment – the same organisation that is conducting tests on the cladding systems of over 600 tower blocks – the final impact assessment concluded:

'Local acts have no statistically significant impact as far as life safety aspects are concerned. For tall buildings there was little benefit, as the inherent degree of compartmentation is sufficient to prevent most fires getting too "big".'

In December 2012 Eric Pickles announced the repeal of Sections 20 and 21 of the [London Building Acts \(Amendment\) Act 1939](#), which contains legislation precisely on precautions against the danger of fire in buildings higher than 100 feet and the use of non-combustible materials and self-closing fire doors.

In August 2016 a fire broke out in Shepherd's Court, an 18-storey tower block in Shepherd's Bush, and spread rapidly up the outside of the building. In response to a Freedom of Information request by [Inside Housing](#), the London Fire Brigade has since released the results of its investigation into the spread of the fire and the role played by the external panels, which were installed during window replacement work more than 10 years before. The [report](#) revealed that the panels were made of 17-23mm plywood board covered by blue polystyrene foam, 1mm steel sheet and decorative white paint:

'As a fire develops and grows further, it is possible that a wide flame front could end up acting on the steel sheet of the panel. The heat from the flames would be conducted through the steel sheet and would therefore melt away the blue foam layer underneath. This would occur in a progressive fashion as the fire develops

and would ultimately lead to the steel sheet not being held in place by sufficient bonded blue foam. The weight of the steel sheet would then ensure that it would become detached from the remainder of the panel (likely fall away) and expose the heat damaged blue foam and plywood layers to the developed flame front. This situation is likely to have occurred to the panels above the flat of fire origin when the living room windows of the flat of fire origin failed during the fire at this scene.'

Inside Housing requested further information from Hammersmith and Fulham council, including the panels' fire protection rating, whether they are installed on any other buildings in the borough, plus a fire risk assessment for Shepherd's Court – but the council refused the FOI request. The panels still appear to be fixed to Shepherd's Court, with the exception of six floors on one side, where fire damage is still visible and tarpaulin sheets are draped across the building; and identical panels appear to be in use on three neighbouring towers, Bush Court, Woodford Court and Roseford Court.

Grenfell Tower Fire Warnings

In a 2014 report titled '[Structural Fire Safety in New and Refurbished Buildings](#)' the London Fire Brigade warned of consequences of councils' in-house Building Control departments having to compete against private contractors:

'The fact that there is competition puts pressure into the system, by potentially diminishing rigour in an effort to win work. Some in-house teams express fear that their own council colleague project officers could choose other providers. Projects are signed off before they should be because of pressure for schemes to be completed.'

Over a year before the Grenfell Tower fire, Kensington and Chelsea council had been issued with fire safety [Enforcement Notices](#) in December 2015 and January 2016 for two of its other tower blocks following a fire at one of them, Adair Tower, a 14-storey block of 78 flats, that broke out in October 2015. Having examined the fire safety conditions in the block, the London Fire Brigade ordered KCTMO to provide self-closing devices on front doors and to improve fire safety in escape staircases in both Adair Tower and in a second block, Hazelwood Tower, that was built to the same design. These, however, were only 2 of the 43 Enforcement Notices on its properties Kensington and Chelsea council has received from the London Fire Brigade over the past three years since July 2014.

Since the Grenfell Tower fire, the [BBC](#) has reported that a dozen letters sent to them by the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group reveal that since 2010 four successive government officials in the Department of Communities and Local

Government, beginning with Eric Pickles, have been warned by them that residents in high-rise blocks are at risk.

In a [letter](#) to Liberal-Democrat MP Stephen Williams, then Parliamentary Under-secretary at the DCLG, dated March 2014, Ronnie King, the Honorary Administrative Secretary of the Fire Safety Group, wrote about installing automatic fire sprinklers in certain types of dwellings in the wake of the Lakanal House fire:

‘Surely, when you already have credible evidence to justify updating a small but important part of the guidance in the Approved Document, which will lead to saving of lives, you don't need to wait another three years, in addition to the two already spent since the research findings were updated, in order to take action?’

‘It seems astounding to me that, although clarification was given by the Department at the inquest, that the composite panels under the external wall window sets of flats at Lakanal House were only required to be class “0” to comply with Building Regulations, and need not have had the fire resistance required under the former Section 20 London Building Acts [*removed by Eric Pickles*]; that this dangerous situation (allowing fire to spread externally into flat 79 within four and a half minutes) has still not been corrected in the Approved Document guidance.

‘As there are estimated to be another 4,000 older tower blocks in the UK, without automatic sprinkler protection, can we really afford to wait for another tragedy to occur before we amend this weakness?’

After further correspondence MP Williams finally responded:

‘I have neither seen nor heard anything that would suggest that consideration of these specific potential changes is urgent and I am not willing to disrupt the work of this department by asking that these matters are brought forward.’

To which the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group wrote that they:

‘Were at a loss to understand how you had concluded that credible and independent evidence, which had life safety implications, was NOT considered to be urgent. As a consequence the group wishes to point out to you that should a major fire tragedy, with loss of life, occur between now and 2017 in, for example, a residential care facility or a purpose built block of flats, where the matters which had been raised here, were found to be contributory to the outcome, then the group would be bound to bring this to others’ attention.’

In December 2015, the Fire Safety and Rescue Group wrote again to Conservative MP James Wharton, Parliamentary Under-secretary in the DCLG at the time, warning him about the risk of fires spreading on the outside of buildings with cladding:

‘Today’s buildings have a much higher content of readily available combustible material. Examples are timber and polystyrene mixes in structure, cladding and insulation. This fire hazard results in many fires because adequate recommendations to developers simply do not exist. There is little or no requirement to mitigate external fire spread.’

The fourth and final minister to ignore the warnings was Conservative MP Gavin Barwell, until the last election the Minister of State for Housing and Planning and now the Chief of Staff in Downing Street, to whom the Fire Safety and Rescue Group wrote in September 2016. The following month, at a [Parliamentary debate](#) on Building Regulations, Barwell said:

‘We have not set out any formal plans to review the Building Regulations as a whole, but we have publicly committed ourselves to reviewing Part B following the Lakanal House fire.’

At the time, the Lakanal House fire had happened seven years ago, and the coroner’s report was then three years old. In February of this year the Department of Communities and Local Government published a summary [report](#) of study into the ‘usability’ of Building Regulations, including Approved Documents B (fire safety). Since then, Document B still hasn’t been updated, and nothing has been published looking into the technical content of the fire safety regulations. When asked about the review of Document B in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire the government said work is [‘ongoing’](#).

Grenfell Residents

It is a measure of how dissatisfied the residents of Grenfell Tower were with the KCTMO that they set up their own community representatives under the name of the [Grenfell Action Group](#). This was formed in 2010 to oppose the construction of the Kensington Aldridge Academy and the rebuilding of the Kensington Leisure Centre ([KALC project](#)), which – with the first development opening in 2013 and the second in 2015 – would incrementally consume most of Lancaster Green, the only local green space available for the residents of the immediately adjacent Grenfell Tower and the two blocks of Grenfell Walk. The group has since formed alliances with numerous housing campaign groups across London, including Architects for Social Housing.

It’s hard to know exactly where to pick up the hundreds of complaints and warnings issued to the KCTMO by the Grenfell Action Group and recorded on their blog; but in

January 2013 they published a [post](#) drawing attention to the impact the loss of the Lancaster Road car-park to the KALC project was having on the fire safety of Grenfell Tower. Because vehicle access to Grenfell Tower is severely restricted, the Lancaster Road car-park had served a vital function over the years as parking space for residents, service and delivery vehicles, as well as backup parking area for the London Fire Brigade. With the loss of the car park there is barely adequate room to manoeuvre for fire engines responding to emergency calls, and any obstruction of the emergency access zone, they warned, 'could have lethal consequences in the event of a serious fire or similar emergency in Grenfell Tower.' The post publishes some of the accumulated photographic evidence of the numerous occasions on which precisely this had happened.

Then in February 2013, under the title '[Another Fire Safety Scandal](#)', the Grenfell Action Group published this extract from the most recent [Fire Risk Assessment](#) of Grenfell Tower, conducted in November 2012:

'From the asset records provided to me by the TMO, the emergency lighting and fire alarm systems, along with the dry riser, fire fighter lifts and the hose reels installed in this building, are all subject to a maintenance contracts. Testing, servicing and maintenance is being carried out by professional third party contractors on a planned preventive maintenance programme, with records kept centrally by the TMO at the "Hub" and by the contractor for all these systems. No test certificates have been seen to confirm this.

[RGE Services Ltd](#) are under contract to the TMO to provide portable fire fighting equipment, testing, servicing and maintenance. The fire extinguisher in this building, the basement boiler room, the lift motor room, the ground floor electrical room plus other areas were out of test date according to the contractors' label on the extinguishers. The last test date was on the 8th August 2011. Some located in the roof level areas had "*condemned*" written on them in large black writing, with a last test date of 2009 or 2010. This seems to indicate that monthly occupier inspections are not being carried out.

'It is not known if the caretaker is undertaking the monthly occupiers' tests of the installed emergency lighting system, fire extinguishers and structural items as per the caretakers check list. This would include the external stairs and lift checks, with the results being kept as a record of testing having been undertaken.'

The following month, March 2013, a follow up blog post reported that neither the Fire Risk Assessment nor their report had received any response from the KCTMO. Then in May Grenfell Tower experienced [power surges](#) during which residents witnessed smoke coming out of light fittings and other electrical appliances, including computers, washing

machines and televisions, some of which exploded. This was reported to the KCTMO on 11 May. The problems [escalated](#) on 29 May, when residents saw and smelt smoke coming from various electrical appliances, and eventually the [whole electrical system](#) went into meltdown, with several key meters fused, and electrical appliances in 40 individual residences damaged or destroyed. Among their fears for their safety, and anger at why the problem of the power surge was not taken seriously when it was first reported, residents voiced particular concerns about the emergency lighting system in the fire stairwell from Grenfell Tower whose testing the Risk Assessment questioned:

‘A single staircase with no natural light is the only emergency exit route from Grenfell Tower. The emergency lighting system in that stairwell should be thoroughly checked to ensure that neither the system itself, nor any of the individual battery packs, has been damaged by the power surges of recent weeks.’

The Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association followed up these concerns by presenting a petition to the Kensington and Chelsea Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee at a meeting the following July. In response a member of the KCTMO present at the meeting told residents that ‘There was no smoke. It was in fact steam caused by water from a leak dropping on to something hot in the flat below.’ The Committee responded to the petition with an [update](#) which, dated 16 July 2013, more than two months after the earliest reports of power surges, stated that ‘it is too early to say whether the problem has been fully resolved, and where responsibility lies for the cause. It is possible that the fault that has been rectified is not the primary cause.’ This primary cause was thought to have been arcing in the mains supply cable, but no attempt was made to explain what caused the arcing. And despite the petition being signed by 94 Grenfell Tower residents out of the 120 households, Laura Johnson, the Director of Housing and author of the update, followed this lack of information with the claim that:

‘There has been a considerable volume of communication from *a small number of residents* in the form of blogs and open “round robin” e-mails, some of which is from people who are not residents of the block. This communication contains a lot of speculation about the cause of the problem. KCTMO has not responded directly to this communication and has focused on keeping residents informed of the facts through direct communication.’

Later that month Mariem Elgwahry and Nadia Choucair, both presumed by Kensington and Chelsea council to be among the authors of the Grenfell Action Group blog, were among the residents sent letters from the council’s Legal Services accusing them of being ‘critical of everything that takes place at Lancaster West in relation to investment on the estate’ and of making ‘direct accusations about unfounded criminal actions’. Stipulating a deadline of 29 July 2013, the senior solicitor, Vimal Sarna, asked that they:

'Remove from the blog unfounded accusations against named individuals which are your personal opinions and are likely to be considered defamatory and also likely to be perceived as harassment by the individuals concerned.'

Both Mariem and Nadia are among the still uncounted missing lost in the Grenfell Tower fire.

In March 2015 nearly 100 residents, representing over 50 households in Grenfell Tower, gathered in the Community Rooms to discuss the [problems](#) the Grenfell Tower Improvement Works were causing residents. These included the lack of meaningful consultation from the KCTMO and the concern that the contractor, Rydon, intended positioning boilers in residents' entrance hallways; that exposed hot pipes would provide a health and safety problem; and more generally at the poor standard of the work. At the end of the month residents formed [Grenfell Community Unite](#), and the following month they sent a letter to the KCTMO requesting a public meeting with members, as well as representatives from Rydon, Studio E Architects and Max Fordham engineering consultants. Claire Williams, the Project Manager, responded with a [letter](#) in which she refused to acknowledge Grenfell Community Unite and therefore to meet with it in a public meeting along with the project contractor and consultants.

Jump forward to November 2016, and in a post titled '[Playing with Fire!](#)', the Grenfell Action Group made this fateful – and now famous – observation:

'It is a truly terrifying thought, but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders.'

The post goes on to cite the fires in Adair House in 2015 and Shepherd's Court in 2016 and the Enforcement Orders issued against the KCTMO. It also questions the advice – delivered, it says, by a temporary notice stuck in the Grenfell Tower lift and a single announcement in a regeneration newsletter – that residents should 'stay put' in the event of fire. In response, in [March 2017](#), the KCTMO finally installed fire safety instruction notices in the entrance hallway to Grenfell Tower and outside the lifts on every floor of the building. Put up just 3 months before the fire, these would have been the instructions residents would have had in mind on the night of June 13-14:

These instructions comply with the evacuation strategy contained in the Fire Risk Assessment of November 2012, which advises residents 'to remain within their own dwelling during a fire incident unless the fire is in that dwelling or it is otherwise affected, in which case they should immediately evacuate the dwelling.' However – and

here once again we come back to the effects of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower in 2016 – this advice is based on the assumption that:

‘The flat or maisonette will have a high degree of *compartmentation* and therefore there will be a low probability of fire spread beyond the flat or maisonette of origin, so simultaneous evacuation of the building is unlikely to be necessary.’

In the building information for this assessment, which was conducted in 2012, the assessor notes:

‘As far as I am aware the construction and any refurbishments of this building have gone through the Building Regulations process. Information has been gathered from the building’s occupants and employees of the TMO, and from an analysis of documents provided by the TMO there is *no external cladding* on this building.’

The Metropolitan Police Force has since confirmed that an exploding fridge-freezer started the fire in Grenfell Tower. This cannot be divorced from the long history of complaints about smoking and exploding electrical appliances made against the KCTMO. Residents have also reported that the central fire alarm in the building did not go off, and they were only alerted to the fire by the actions of other residents – many of them Muslims awake during Ramadan – who banged on their front doors. [The Evening Standard](#) has since revealed that the property services group responsible for installing the alarms, [Lakehouse](#), which last year posted a £31.7 million operating loss, is currently under a three-year investigation by the Metropolitan Police Fraud Squad. The company is under suspicion of providing defective safety equipment that was installed in hundreds of properties across London, with ten people having been arrested after Hackney Council received allegations of ‘fraud and overcharging’ from whistleblowers. Survivors from the fire have also said that the emergency lights in the fire escape route did not come on – just as the Grenfell Action Group had feared.

Most worryingly of all, the London Fire Brigade said on the Thursday morning after the fire that they had not been able to put out the flames until they had isolated a ruptured gas mains in the tower block. Some months after the refurbishment was completed in May 2016, the National Grid installed gas risers and pipes in the fire escape stairwell and landings. On 27 March residents had been assured by Sacha Jevans, Director of Operations at KCTMO, that they would be boxed in with ‘fire-rated’ protection, but according to a report in the [Guardian](#), two-thirds of the horizontal pipes were still exposed when the fire broke out on 14 June. In an e-mail to Kensington and Chelsea at least three months before the disaster, Tunde Awoderu, Vice-chair of Grenfell Tower Leaseholders’ Association, wrote:

'This exposed gas pipe throughout the building has put our life in danger and we don't feel secure in the building any more. If there was a gas leak on one of those pipes and someone was smoking that would be the end of the building.'

Following a gas leak, the works were originally undertaken by the National Grid's gas distribution arm; but in March 2017 the firm was sold to investors, which included the Qatari Investment Authority, and renamed Cadent Gas. In response to questions about the works a spokesperson confirmed that 'the riser in the stairwell had been boxed in when the fire occurred, and work was still ongoing to box in the lateral pipes.' What the rupture of this gas mains did to the spread of the fire inside the building can only be imagined, but its effects were there for everyone outside the building to see.

A further possible contributing factor was that Max Fordham, the engineering consultants on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, in its [Sustainability & Energy Statement](#) from 2012, recommended 'partially removing the fire stopping between floors and replacing it after the new pipework was installed' as part of the option to install new central heating pipework within all six service risers in the building. It is not clear whether this recommendation was acted upon, and the company website makes no mention of Grenfell Tower.

Despite this catalogue of criminal negligence towards the fire safety of Grenfell Tower in the years and months leading up to the fire, we still believe that the spread of the smoke and flames through, up and across the combustible cladding system and its ignition of the flammable insulation were the two primary causes of the rapid spread of the fire over the building's fire stopping; and that the lack of sprinklers, the failure to install self-closing fire doors, the absence of a working central fire alarm, the evacuation strategy advice based on absent conditions, the malfunctioning of emergency lights in the escape stairwell, the installation of an unprotected gas mains up that stairwell, and the difficulty the Fire Brigade had gaining access to the tower block were all contributing but secondary factors towards an already deadly fire. Nevertheless, the responsibility for this lack of fire safety inside Grenfell Tower lies with those who, at every level of design, management, maintenance and repair, failed for year after year to ensure these fire safety conditions never arose and, when they did, that they were quickly addressed and fixed. So why were the repeated fears and warnings of residents and the Grenfell Action Group ignored in the face of the mounting evidence of the risk of fire in Grenfell Tower?

Grenfell Tower Deregulation

In an interview with the *Guardian* after the Grenfell Tower fire, architect and fire safety expert Sam Webb, who sits on the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group, said:

'We are still wrapping postwar high-rise buildings in highly flammable materials and leaving them without sprinkler systems installed, then being surprised when they burn down. I really don't think the building industry understands how fire behaves in buildings and how dangerous it can be. The government's mania for deregulation means our current safety standards just aren't good enough.'

In February 2014, Conservative MP Brandon Lewis, then the Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Communities and Local Government but the future Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Services, in a Parliamentary debate on [Fire Sprinklers Week](#), explained at length how the coalition government's '[One-in, two-out](#)' policy on new regulation – which meant that for every pound that newly-made regulation costs businesses, existing regulations whose compliance costs businesses two pounds must be removed or modified – would be applied to Building Regulations relating to fire safety:

'Many in the fire sector have at times argued for more regulation to require sprinklers in domestic properties. Since taking office in 2010, the coalition Government have been very clear about their policy on sprinklers, but I want to put it on the record again. Sprinklers work. We know that. No one can deny it. They are an effective way of controlling fires and of protecting lives and property. That is why they are required in certain higher-risk premises, under Building Regulations, and why all guidance that we make available to support compliance with the fire safety order highlights sprinklers as an effective risk-mitigation measure.

'However, not all buildings carry the same level of risk. Those with responsibility for ensuring fire safety in their businesses, in their homes or as landlords should and must make informed decisions on how best to manage the risks in their own properties. In our commitment to be the first Government to reduce regulation, we have introduced the one in, two out rule for regulation. In that context, Members will understand why we want to exhaust all non-regulatory options before we introduce any new regulations.

'There are always calls for Government to change Building Regulations, and that is often the default position of those who see regulation as an easy answer. However, it is not the only answer. We should intervene only if it is entirely necessary, and only as a last resort. Although we have not carried out a fundamental review of Building Regulations for fire safety, we recognise that it is important to maintain and update standards. No doubt, the use of sprinklers will form part of that work.

'We believe that it is the responsibility of the fire industry, rather than the Government, to market fire sprinkler systems effectively and to encourage their wider installation. The cost of fitting a fire sprinkler system may affect house

building – something we want to encourage – so we must wait to see what impact that regulation has.’

According to a report in the [Guardian](#), on the same morning as the Grenfell Tower fire the [Red Tape Initiative](#) convened a pre-arranged meeting of a panel to investigate housing regulations. Formed in April 2017 to take advantage of the opportunities for deregulation offered by the UK leaving the European Union, the Red Tape Initiative is an [extremely well-connected](#) cross-party organisation. Chaired by Conservative MP Sir Oliver Letwin, the former Minister of State for Government Policy who after the 1985 riots had co-authored the infamous [memo](#) about Broadwater Farm estate, the initiative included on its advisory panel Conservative MP Michael Gove, until he was appointed Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs three days previously, and has been offered the [support](#) of Conservative MP Greg Clark, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Undeterred by the tower of smoke issuing from the inferno in West London, the housing panel met to consider a document titled *The EU's Impact on the UK Housing and Construction Industry*. Targeting Construction Products Regulation ([EU 305/2011](#)) as ‘expensive and burdensome for small businesses’, the document was written by Alex Hackett, the Executive Director of the new Conservative-led lobbying firm Hanbury Strategy, which was set up by the Director of Communications for the Vote Leave campaign, Paul Stephenson, who was also the former Director of Strategy for the former Prime Minister David Cameron. Among the expensive burdens this document wished to see removed from EU regulations is the requirement that:

‘Construction works must be designed and built in such a way that in the event of an outbreak of fire the generation and spread of fire and smoke within the construction works are limited.’

The Red Tape Initiative has close links to [Policy Exchange](#), the neo-liberal Conservative think-tank set up by, among others, Michael Gove, and which is rated one of the three least transparent UK think-tanks with regard to where its funding comes from. Among those sitting on the advisory panel of the Red Tape Initiative is Archie Norman, the former Conservative MP, CEO of Asda and founder of Policy Exchange; as well as Charles Moore, the former editor of the *Telegraph* and the Chair of Policy Exchange; while present on the Red Tape Initiative housing regulations panel the morning of the Grenfell Tower fire was Richard Blakeway, Chief Adviser to Policy Exchange’s Housing and Urban Regeneration Unit, who was also Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and Property at the Greater London Authority for eight years, as well as Chair of the Homes for London board, and is currently a Board Director at the Homes and Communities Agency. Policy Exchange is perhaps most famous for producing an anti-Muslim report in 2007 titled *The Hijacking of British Islam: How extremist literature is subverting mosques in the UK*, which was subsequently accused of manufacturing evidence, and whose widespread coverage in the right-wing press was potentially responsible for the attack on the

Finsbury Park Mosque, which the report falsely identified as a distributor of Islamist literature, on the Monday after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Less well known is that in January 2013 Policy Exchange produced the report [Create Streets](#), which recommended that all the high-rise estates built in London between 1950s and early 1980s – but presumably not the Barbican estate – be demolished and replaced with mid-rise blocks built on London’s so-called ‘traditional’ street plan. To this end they estimated that 360,000 council homes (housing around a million residents) should be demolished. In 2012 Policy Exchange had also published a report titled [Ending Expensive Social Tenancies](#) that recommended accelerating the sale of high-value social housing in London, using the receipts to build affordable housing, and moving previous tenants to the periphery of the capital. To back up its argument the report asserted – but produced no proof – that ‘the majority of social tenants are either totally or largely reliant on benefits.’ As a measure of the political influence Policy Exchange exerts, four years later this recommendation on the sale of high-value social housing became legislation enshrined in UK law under chapter 3, part 4 of the [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#).

We should sit up and listen, therefore, when in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, Policy Exchange published an article titled [Only taking politics out of Grenfell will solve housing crisis](#), in which Susan Emmett, the think-tank’s Head of Housing and Urban Regeneration, argued:

‘Against the febrile backdrop of the Grenfell tragedy, Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, has signalled the need for further urban and estate regeneration in the capital. He is right to prompt councils to look beyond refurbishing old council stock and seek fundamental change to bring forward a bigger number of higher quality homes and better places. Rethinking land use around big estates to include traditional street patterns, mid-rise buildings, mansion blocks, terraced housing and well-designed public space with greenery not only contributes to higher densities that big cities need but neighbourhoods communities want.’

5. The Programme of Estate Regeneration

The victims of the Grenfell Tower fire were killed by a programme that threatens the residents of every council estate in London – the programme of estate ‘regeneration’. Just as we have seen this programme being implemented by Labour and Conservative councils alike, so we are now seeing the same cross-party manipulation of this disaster to promote further estate demolition from journalists and politicians from both the Conservative and Labour parties. Sir Simon Jenkins, a former editor of the *Evening Standard*, the *Times* and the *Economist*, and currently a journalist for the *Evening Standard* and the *Guardian*, wrote in the [latter](#) paper:

‘Residential towers are antisocial, high-maintenance, disempowering, unnecessary, mostly ugly, and never truly safe.’

Andrew Gimson, a biographer of Boris Johnson and journalist for the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Evening Standard*, wrote in the [latter](#) about his visit to the site of the disaster:

‘We saw in plain view the blackened shape of Grenfell Tower, standing among several other towers of seemingly identical design. And I could not help reflecting that I would not ever want to live in any of those towers. I prefer my little terraced house. So, if they can, do most people. Those towers were indeed built, for the most part, for the poor, not the rich. The architects who designed them and the planners who gave consent for them very seldom chose to live in them. They were a shoddy, second-rate solution, masquerading as some sort of progress. Grenfell Tower was the expression of a zeitgeist that seemed unstoppable. But can’t we now stop it, tear down these repulsive blocks and get back to building the decent, modest streets where people actually want to live?’

In his eagerness to tar every council estate with his aesthetic distaste, Gimson was perhaps unaware that two of the residents who died in the Grenfell Tower fire, Gloria Trevisan and Marco Gottardi, were in fact architects. But their presence on the 23rd floor of Grenfell Tower didn’t fit Gimson’s sneering narrative of council estate poverty. His claim, however, that architects don’t live in council estates or tower blocks, is the kind of ‘common knowledge’ Architects for Social Housing – many of whose members live in both – is used to hearing in the mouths of politicians seeking excuses to knock them down and give the land they stand on to their partners in the building industry. David Lammy, for example, the Labour Member of Parliament for Tottenham, wrote in the [Guardian](#):

‘There are 700 tower blocks of 11 storeys or more in the capital alone, the vast majority of which were built in the 1960s and 1970s. The conditions in Grenfell Tower are mirrored in housing estates across the country. For decades we have consigned people to live in overcrowded conditions that are not just

unacceptable but that, in many cases, are criminally unsafe. Families live in hutches, not houses.'

To which he added in an interview on BBC Radio 4's [Today programme](#):

'Many of us across the country have been caught up in an election, knocking on housing estate doors right across the country, travelling up to the top floors of tower blocks, and we know as politicians that the conditions in this country are unacceptable. Those 70s buildings – many of them should be demolished.'

Not to be outdone by a Labour MP's enthusiasm for estate demolition, Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green – who in the three years between January 2011 and February 2014, as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [oversaw](#) the death of 2,650 people who had been found fit for work following disability benefit assessments by Atos Healthcare – spoke in [Parliament](#) about the Grenfell Tower fire with the following suggestion:

'I ask the Prime Minister to add one further remit to the Public Inquiry: to look at whether the whole process of retrofitting old tower blocks is viable at all, and at whether there is a better way to house and support tenants in these areas without the use of the many incredibly badly designed and very faulty tower blocks. Will she ask the Public Inquiry to look carefully at whether it is feasible to bring some of the blocks down and provide more family-friendly housing?'

Most dangerously of all, however, given his support for London's estate demolition programme as London Mayor, Sadiq Khan – who in last year's [Draft Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration](#) reneged on his election promises that resident support must be a condition of estate regeneration and that demolition would not go ahead if it resulted in a loss of social housing, and has steadfastly refused to give residents the right of veto over the demolition of their homes – wrote in the [Guardian](#) (and it is this statement to which the Policy Exchange article referred):

'The greatest legacy of this tragedy may well end up being the skyline of our towns and cities. In the postwar rush to reconstruct our country, towers went up in large numbers, most of which are still here today. Nowadays, we would not dream of building towers to the standards of the 1970s, but their inhabitants still have to live with that legacy. It may well be the defining outcome of this tragedy that the worst mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s are systematically torn down.'

It should be clear from our report that none of these claims have any factual basis – and worse, that in calling for the demolition of tower blocks on council estates they are actively concealing the truth about the political context for, managerial decisions that led to, and the technical causes of the Grenfell Tower fire. But why are politicians from

both the Labour and Conservative parties so eager to see the only homes working-class Londoners can still afford to rent 'systematically torn down'?

Grenfell Tower Opportunism

Let's start with David Lammy, who since the fire – despite it happening on the other side of town in a Conservative-run borough – appears to have been elected the Labour Party's spokesperson for the residents of Grenfell Tower. As evidence of his claim that 700 tower blocks across London are 'unacceptable' and even 'criminally unsafe', David Lammy cited the Broadwater Farm estate in his own constituency. In fact – rather than in the political rhetoric and tabloid journalism about the estate – [Broadwater Farm](#), just like the Lancaster West estate, has a far lower crime rate than the surrounding area. In a 2003 survey of all the estate's residents only 2 per cent said they considered the area unsafe, the lowest figure for any area in London. It also has the lowest rent arrears of any part of the borough. The estate's notoriety, however, as home to rioters in 1985 and again in 2011, placed it on the list of estates tarred by David Cameron as 'sink estates' in January 2016, when he announced the [Estate Regeneration National Strategy](#) that is targeting 100 estates across the UK. Along with Northumberland Park, which is also in Lammy's constituency, Broadwater Farm is one of 21 estates in Haringey that has been condemned for demolition under the Haringey Development Vehicle into which – against resident's similarly ignored wishes – Haringey Labour council has entered with international property developers Lendlease as part of a £2 billion sale of public land and assets.

As anyone engaged in trying to resist the programme of estate demolition knows, there really is no depth to which politicians won't sink to push their privatisation schemes through under the guise of improving the lives of residents whose homes and safety they have neglected for years; but presumably Lammy doesn't include the Barbican estate, for instance, in his list of London's 1960s and 70s tower blocks he thinks should be 'demolished', or the deposit boxes in the sky Lendlease is throwing up in the Elephant and Castle on the ruins of the [Heygate estate](#) – where 1,200 demolished council homes are being replaced with 2,535 luxury homes of which a mere 82 will be for social rent – and which they will no doubt be erecting with a similar proportion of social housing on the public land they have been handed by Haringey council.

For his efforts Lammy was subsequently elected to the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee. In his [nomination statement](#) Lammy wrote:

'In light of the Grenfell Tower fire it is my intention that the Committee will conduct an inquiry into Building Regulations and fire safety in tower blocks and social housing as soon as possible.'

All well and good, but he said nothing about the estate regeneration programme that made that fire so lethal, and that has condemned council estates in his own Tottenham constituency to privatisation, demolition and redevelopment under a programme that will replicate everything that led to the Grenfell Tower fire. A former barrister at Lincoln's Inn who studied at Harvard Law School, Lammy has previous in this sort of careerism. In March 2016 he was fined £5,000 for instigating nearly 36,000 automatic phone calls urging people to back his campaign to be London Mayor. This didn't stop him, on the day before the Labour Cabinet voted in favour of the Haringey Development Vehicle that will make thousands of his constituents homeless, from being quoted in the [Observer](#) claiming: 'I have always seen my primary job as being to represent my constituents or people like them.'

Lammy has taken care to write several [letters](#) to the council raising his 'concerns' about the Haringey Development Vehicle, but none of them confront the reality of estate regeneration, which is designed to evict estate residents from their homes, and no manner of tinkering with its processes will ameliorate its effects. Even if they had the mind to – which they do not – councils that hand over estate land to property developers have no response to the viability assessments which their private 'partners' produce – usually commissioned from estate agent Savills – showing just how few homes for social rent their profit margins will permit. Lammy's subsequent [suggestion](#) that, instead of entering into a PFI deal with Lendlease, Haringey Labour council set up a Special Purpose Vehicle that will allow it to act as a housing association, shows just how little he knows about, or understands, the failings of such SPVs in Labour-run boroughs. Under the name of Southwark Housing Company, or Homes for Lambeth, or Croydon's Brick by Brick, or Newham's Red Door Ventures, some of the greatest loss of social housing is resulting from estate demolition and redevelopment by the very privatisation schemes Lammy is promoting.

ASH visited Grenfell Tower on the Thursday after the fire, and one of the things that struck us from an architectural point of view was that – even after two days of burning – the 1970s reinforced concrete building was still structurally sound and intact. In contrast, the 2010s inflammable insulation and combustible aluminium composite rainscreen panning the council paid a private contractor to attach in order to improve the view for property investors in the area lay in burnt fragments across the neighbouring gardens and streets. Lammy is right to say that 'the conditions in Grenfell Tower are mirrored in housing estates across the country', but those conditions are the ones that have been imposed as part of their regeneration under PFI and SPV schemes that are handing over the management, refurbishment and redevelopment of our public housing to private contractors.

It's not for us to speculate whether David Lammy is cynically manipulating this disaster to further his own career or simply out of his depth; but once again we have a politician who has no knowledge of what he is talking about tarring all council estates with the

same brush in order to promote London's estate demolition programme. As any housing campaigner will tell you, that's nothing new – but in this case it's dipped in the blood of the dead and homeless of Grenfell Tower. We strongly condemn the use of this man-made disaster by politicians, journalists and think-tanks to promote a programme that threatens hundreds of London estates with the same privatised management structures and developer-friendly regeneration schemes that caused it. Estates don't need demolishing and redeveloping by the private companies getting rich on the housing crisis; they need maintaining, refurbishing and making safe by the councils that are paid by residents to do exactly that. If, as Grenfell Tower is revealing, councils are unwilling to carry out their duty of service to residents, other means of management must be considered. We will return to the question of what at the end of this report.

Grenfell Tower Politics

The Grenfell Tower fire happened in a Conservative-run borough, but the series of management and political decisions that led to the fire – the indifference of the Tenant Management Organisation to residents, the contracting out of the refurbishment to a private company specialising in cost management, the cost cutting that led to flammable insulation material being used, the negligence that led to the use of a combustible cladding system that acted as a chimney for the fire, the ignoring of warnings by the London Fire Brigade and residents about inadequate fire safety in the block, and the financial motivations for the refurbishment itself – are being replicated across London. And although the Labour Party has sought to turn this disaster into a stick with which to beat the Conservative government, the estate regeneration programme that caused it is primarily being implemented in Labour boroughs, where more than 170 estates that we know of are under threat of privatisation, demolition and social cleansing by the regeneration schemes of Labour-run councils.

If you're wondering why both Labour mayor Sadiq Khan and Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith are so keen on 'tearing down' London's council estate tower blocks, a 2-bedroom apartment in Lambeth's Oval Quarter, built on the 305 demolished homes of the [Myatts Field North](#) estate in Brixton, is selling today for £595,000. The 58 leaseholders were offered on average £114,500 compensation for their demolished homes, which was nothing like enough to buy a home on the new development, where 503 properties for private sale were built on the cleared land, 105 of which were for shared ownership. Not a single additional flat for council rent was built. The remaining 172 council homes were [refurbished](#) to the Decent Homes Standard by – of all people – Rydon, the same company contracted by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation to refurbish Grenfell Tower, and the same [complaints](#) by residents there have been made against Lambeth council, which is Labour-run. These include faulty electric sockets and dangerous wiring – something, as we have seen, that the residents of Grenfell Tower complained about to the KCTMO since the block-wide power-surge in March 2013, and is likely to have started the fire that killed them. And

like them, the residents of Myatts Field North have been [ignored](#) for the past three years by Lambeth council, which has handed over the running of the estate to a private consortium, Regenter, which has in turn subcontracted out the servicing and maintenance of the estate to a housing management company.

After the Lakanal House fire, Arnold Tarling, the quantity surveyor and fire safety expert who described the spread of the fire across the cladding on Grenfell Tower, visited Brittany Point, one of three surviving tower blocks on the Ethelred estate, which is also in Lambeth, and which is run by the Ethelred TMO. In a [BBC report](#), Tarling described the tower block as a 'disaster waiting to happen', citing flammable expanding foam around windows that would give off a thick black smoke if set alight; a 13-year gap in recorded fire-hose services; gaps underneath fire-resistant panels that render them useless; and panels containing a polystyrene which could melt, give off smoke and add fuel to flames. The Chair of the Ethelred Towers Residents' Association came to the ASH meeting on Grenfell Tower, and the following Tuesday the TRA held their AGM. Among the many questions about the fire safety of the Ethelred estate tower blocks, residents complained that – just as in Grenfell Tower – gas mains were running through the escape stairwell, and as part of the ongoing regeneration of the estate services have been left passing into the common stairwell without fire stopping. One resident said: 'The lack of proper procedures and services and communication in place here are exactly the same as what led to the Grenfell Tower fire.' A woman with four kids who lives on the 16th floor of one of tower blocks said: 'The council shouldn't have elderly and babies and young children above the 8th floor.' Another said: 'The system is fundamentally flawed. Subcontractors take a cut at every stage. We are getting a poor service for large sums of money.' Waving a printed copy of the BBC report, residents angrily demanded to know whether anything had been done to fix the problems identified by Tarling 8 years ago. The officers from Lambeth Labour council that were present at the AGM – which included Tim Davies, the Fire Risk Assessor – didn't respond.

As we said, Rydon has removed its webpage on the deadly refurbishment of Grenfell Tower; but it has left up the page on its refurbishment of the [Chalcots estate](#) in Camden – where several thousand residents have been made homeless while the same combustible and flammable aluminium composite material Reynobond panels are removed – and at the very bottom of the page it says: 'Rydon is maintaining the properties for the duration of the PFI contract.' Camden council, in other words, has contracted out not just the refurbishment, but also the maintenance, servicing and fire-safety of residents' homes on the Chalcots estate to the same private company that was the principal contractor on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment, and which used the same subcontractor, Harley Facades, to install the panels. In privatising the servicing of the Chalcots estate the Labour council has, if anything, created an even more unaccountable management structure than the KCTMO created by the Conservative council, which had similarly contracted out the fire safety of Grenfell Tower to RGE Services. And it was

another Arms-Length Management Organisation, Hackney Homes – which was set up by Hackney Labour council in 2006 in order to receive its allocation of the government's £1.6 billion Decent Homes programme – that signed off the defective fire safety work in their properties, including the installation of smoke and fire alarms, by Lakehouse, the company responsible for installing the same alarms that didn't go off during the Grenfell Tower fire.

Despite this, Labour politicians like David Lammy and their supporters in the press are attributing the responsibility for this disaster to the Conservative Party alone, while absolving the Labour Party of all complicity in estate regeneration. At the same time, under the guise of various 'grass-roots' fronts, Labour activists are turning this disaster into a bid to take over the running of Kensington and Chelsea council. At the Kensington and Chelsea council meeting on 19 July, the Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Robert Atkinson, declared:

'The thing we must start with is to change the entire political culture of the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. I am now confident that at the council elections next May the old regime will be swept away, and a new listening and united council, led by Labour councillors, will take its place. From now on, this council must do things with its residents, and not to or for them. Previously, you Tories have gone through the motions of public consultations and involvement, but as one of your own side said: "We hear but we do not listen". The Labour opposition in this council has repeatedly warned that your Tory housing and regeneration policies were breaking up our communities and exiling people who in many cases have lived here for generations. Assisted by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who has credibility and a democratic mandate, we need to get on with rebuilding the borough.'

Perhaps the only people capable of fully appreciating the bare-faced cheek of this statement are the tens of thousands of residents who, on the Heygate estate, on the Ferrier estate, on Woodberry Down, on Cressingham Gardens, on Broadwater Farm and across London, have been consulted by Labour councils prior to the demolition and redevelopment of their estates for private ownership and capital investment, and who have looked in vain to the London Mayor to honour his election promise to give residents veto over the demolition of their homes. Councillor Atkinson was right to denounce what he called 'the social cleansing practiced by this council in its regeneration policies and its failure to build new homes for all but the very wealthiest', but his statement completely ignores the fact that exactly the same fire-safety conditions, unaccountable council, privatised management structures and estate regeneration schemes that led to the fire in Grenfell Tower also exist in every Labour-run borough in London.

The disaster of the Grenfell Tower fire is the very worst thing that can result from estate regeneration carried out not for the benefit of residents, but to win government funding that has been withdrawn from council budgets, raise residual values for council-owned land and maximise profits for private companies under PFI deals; but these financial incentives and the management structures designed to realise them are in place in every London borough. Many people have been won over by Jeremy Corbyn's response to this disaster, which has been in stark contrast to Theresa May's typically awkward indifference and lack of leadership; but it would be wrong to think that conditions are any different on estate regeneration schemes being implemented by Labour councils, all in accordance with [Labour housing policy](#). Corbyn has given his direct backing and support to Lambeth Labour council's estate privatisation programme, Homes for Lambeth, and has remained resolutely silent on the Haringey Development Vehicle – as he has about the social cleansing of estate communities from their homes by the regeneration schemes being implemented by Labour councils across London, whether by SPVs or PFIs. To ignore this fact, or to try and suppress it for the sake of party political allegiance, is not just morally indefensible, it is a betrayal of the people who died in the Grenfell Tower fire and the thousands more who are demanding the truth about why they did.

A tragedy – which is how this fire is being described by politicians, councillors, the media and the contractors and consultants responsible for its deadly effects – is something that happens to someone as a consequence of their arrogance and greed. The residents of Grenfell Tower may have died because they were poor, as has widely been claimed, but it wasn't their poverty that killed them. The fire that consumed their homes and lives is not a tragedy but a man-made disaster that should never have happened. Unlike a tragedy, the victims of this fire are entirely innocent of the disaster they foresaw. It remains to be seen whether those whose arrogance and greed caused it will be held to account. But it is up to us to ensure that such a disaster never happens again, and that the political decisions, management structures and technical conditions that led to the fire are not ignored and suppressed as they were eight years ago after the Lakanal House fire.

Grenfell Tower Community

Beyond the technical, management and political causes of the Grenfell Tower fire, there are the cultural and ideological ones, including the fear of the black communities that live on council estates (*criminals, single mothers, drug dealers, rioters*), fear of the Muslim communities that live on council estates (*foreigners, breeding families, religious extremists, terrorists*), and disgust with the working-class communities that live on council estates (*anti-social, work shy, state-subsidised, benefit scroungers*).

After the attack on London Bridge less than a fortnight before the Grenfell Tower fire, the newspaper columnist and former radio presenter Katie Hopkins, one of the loudest

mouthpieces of this fear and disgust, called for a 'final solution' to what the disgusted home-owners in nearby Kensington Row – where some of the survivors of the fire have been promised housing – who were worried about the devaluation of their multi-million pound properties, called *'these people'*. As its numerous precedents forewarned, the Grenfell Tower fire is an inevitable result of the national strategy of social cleansing through estate regeneration – a strategy that is the basis to the housing policies of both the Labour and the Conservative parties, but which can only be implemented by Labour and Conservative councils politically, economically and technically on the foundation of cultural and ideological fear and disgust. Cladding is the blinkers on the eyes of the property-owning classes who don't want to be reminded that council tenants live among them. The truth is, poor people died because rich people didn't want to see where they lived. Or where they died.

On Sunday 18 June, while an unknown number of working-class, black and Muslim bodies lay unrecovered in the smoldering crematorium of Grenfell Tower, Holland Park Opera went ahead with its production of *Don Giovanni* less than a mile away. The Opera received funding of £450,000 per year from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea until 2015, when it received a final grant of £5 million. Picnic hampers for audience members are available for £265.

There is, however, one positive to come out of the Grenfell Tower fire disaster. From Conservative central government to Labour local authorities and the developers, contractors and consultants they employ, council estates have been universally slandered as breeding grounds for anti-social behaviour, havens for crime and drug-dealing, homes to rioters and broken families. What we have seen in response to the Grenfell Tower fire, by contrast, is the strength of the Lancaster West estate community in the face of disaster, the valued place it occupies in the surrounding community of North Kensington, and the courage and dignity of Grenfell Tower residents in the face of unimaginable loss.

The Grenfell Tower fire was not an accident but an inevitable result of the managed decline of council estates as a principle of our housing policy, the deliberate neglect of maintenance to homes preparatory to their demolition and redevelopment, and the unaccountability of councils, tenant management organisations and the private contractors they employ to the concerns and even the lives of residents. From the government's Estate Regeneration National Strategy and the London Mayor's *Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration* to the [individual schemes](#) of London's councils, existing policy is to demolish our estates, evict their residents and redevelop the land as luxury apartments for home ownership and capital investment. If – as politicians never tire of telling us – we must 'learn the lessons' of this man-made disaster, we should start by stopping the social cleansing of communities like that of Grenfell Tower and start investing in the maintenance, refurbishment and security of London's council estates and the residents who call them home. Our homes need maintaining by accountable and

representative bodies, not managed decline by private management and developers trying to profit from this disaster.

Everything that created London's housing crisis is being replayed at Grenfell Tower. The bodies of the dead haven't even been counted yet, and already this fire is being used to promote the very estate regeneration and privatisation programme that caused it – and by those who have the most to gain from its implementation. If we don't stop this now, one day we might be forced to admit that the only thing worse than people burning to death in their homes because of greed and corruption is the way their deaths were shamelessly used to promote further greed and corruption. From Prime Minister and London Mayor to local councillor and national journalist, the servants of the state are working overtime to reduce the complexities of what caused this disaster to the simple equation that serves them best: *'Council estates are dangerous: so we must demolish them!'* Anyone who supports this lie does so on the graves of the Grenfell Tower dead.

As this report demonstrates, the reason the Grenfell Tower fire was not contained by the fire stops in the building and put out by the fire brigade as a matter of routine, but instead spread up and across the tower in minutes, had nothing to do with it being 'badly designed' or 'faulty' – as Iain Duncan Smith claimed – or because the 'building standards' of the 1970s were inadequate – as Sadiq Khan equally erroneously said. On the contrary, it is the current Building Regulations, which have been sat on for four years by the DCLG against warnings from coroners and fire experts in the wake of the Lakanal House fire, that are inadequate to stop the criminally negligent refurbishment of council blocks under PFI and SPV schemes. If the conditions in Grenfell Tower are – as David Lammy claimed – 'mirrored in housing estates across the country', it is only on those to which inflammable insulation and cladding systems have been added by private contractors under pressure from privatised management organisations to cut the cost of these schemes, even when it puts the lives of residents at risk. If the 'greatest legacy' of the Grenfell Tower fire is that the only housing hundreds of thousands of Londoners and millions of UK citizens can afford to live in is – in Sadiq Khan's idiotic phrase – 'systematically pulled down', we will have learned nothing from this disaster except – as we saw with Orgreave and Hillsborough – how to turn another national tragedy into another national cover-up.

It is in the nature of capitalism to capitalise on any disaster, whether natural or man-made, and turn it into a market opportunity. The culpability of the police in the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989 was covered up by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and blamed instead on crowd behaviour. This led to the introduction of all-seater stadiums in the top two tiers of English football, doubling the entrance price overnight and preparing the way for the social cleansing of the British working class from its own game that we have today. In the same way, politicians lobbying for builders and developers are already trying to turn the effects of the criminally negligent regeneration of an estate, which Kensington and Chelsea council

wanted to demolish in the first place, into a further reason to demolish every estate standing on London's immensely valuable land, further increasing the social cleansing of working-class communities from London. It is not by chance that when the Hillsborough disaster that killed 96 people happened, the Football Spectators Bill 1989, which gave the Secretary of State the power to make the seating of spectators a condition of issuing an authority the licence to admit spectators, was being read in Parliament. In the same way, the Housing and Planning Act 2016, the Estate Regeneration National Strategy 2016 and the GLA's *Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration* will determine how the Grenfell Tower will be interpreted for the public. Of this we are certain: it won't be long before the first London council declares that the Grenfell Tower fire is proof that refurbishment of post-war housing is not a valid option, and that the only way to regenerate deliberately run-down council estates is to demolish and redevelop them.

6. Accountability for the Grenfell Tower Fire

In November 2016, in the [blog post](#) that predicted the Grenfell Tower fire, the Grenfell Action Group wrote:

'It is our conviction that a serious fire in a tower block or similar high density residential property is the most likely reason that those who wield power at the KCTMO will be found out and brought to justice!'

Among the thousands and thousands of messages written in tribute books, on message walls, on placards tied to railings and on banners carried on protests expressing sorrow and loss and anger, the overwhelming demand is for the truth about what happened and justice for the victims. But what justice can balance the scale of this disaster, and who will be found guilty in its scales?

Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry

Well, even by the terms of the fateful predictions of the Grenfell Action Group, it hasn't been a good start. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, who refused to meet with residents when she visited Grenfell Tower on the day after the fire, responded by announcing a [public inquiry](#). A [public inquiry](#) is ordered by the government in order to investigate certain events, such as when a death or deaths have occurred, or issues of serious public concern. The Minister calling the inquiry – which in this case is Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – sets the 'terms of reference' that determine the scope of the inquiry, making them as wide or narrow as he deems fit. Although findings and recommendations could be relevant to future civil or criminal proceedings, under the [Inquiries Act 2005](#) an inquiry cannot rule on civil or criminal liability. As the explanatory notes published with the Act makes very clear:

'There is often a strong feeling, particularly following high profile, controversial events, that an inquiry should determine who is to blame for what has occurred. However, inquiries are not courts and their findings cannot and do not have legal effect. The aim of an inquiry is to help to restore public confidence in systems or services by investigating the facts and making recommendations to prevent recurrence, not to establish liability or to punish anyone'

In an inquiry, survivors, family members of the deceased and interested groups – which in this case would include the Grenfell Action Group – are called 'core participants'; these can all benefit from public funding for legal representation, and employ lawyers to question witnesses. The conclusions of an inquiry are written in a report, given first to the government and then published for the public. Having wide terms of reference can prolong the time an inquiry takes to complete – with the Iraq Inquiry, for example, taking seven years – but the inquiry can also produce a preliminary report in a relatively

short period of time on matters of immediate concern. In the Grenfell Tower Inquiry these would include identifying any urgent action that needs to be taken towards fire safety standards in similar buildings as well as how they have been compromised by estate regeneration schemes. In response to public complaints about the original deadline, the period for consultation on the [terms of reference](#) for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry has been extended to 28 July 2017.

However, Theresa May followed her announcement up by appointing [Sir Martin Moore-Bick](#), a recently retired Court of Appeal judge who specialised in commercial law, to lead the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Among the cases testifying against Moore-Bick's suitability for this role was his 2014 decision – later overturned by the Supreme Court – that allowed Westminster council to rehouse a single mother with five children 50 miles away in Milton Keynes. The decision had been welcomed by Dominic Raab – at the time the Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Civil Liberties and now the Minister of State for Courts and Justice – who also praised Moore-Bick's decision to deport a foreign-born criminal whose young children lived in Britain as 'some long-awaited common sense on the application of Article 8 [of the European Convention on Human Rights]'

This was bad enough, but then the Director General and Secretary to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry was named as Mark Fisher, who under Iain Duncan Smith's murderous regime was Social Justice Director in the Department for Work and Pensions, where he was responsible for the prevention of welfare dependency. Fisher had previously overseen the design and delivery of the Work Programme, under which 120,000 people claiming Jobseekers Allowance were forced to work 30-hour weeks unpaid for a month or have their benefits sanctioned for half a year, a Mandatory Work Activity scheme that was exploited by 534 companies, charities, religious groups and other organisations.

Finally, Sajid Javid announced that the Chair of a new panel set up to advise the government on its response to the Grenfell Tower fire has been named as Sir Ken Knight, the government's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for England between 2007 and 2013. In his August 2009 [report](#) on the Lakanal House fire for the DCLG, Knight – a former London Fire Commissioner – wrote:

'It is not considered as practical or economically viable to make a requirement for the retrospective fitting of fire suppression systems to all current high-rise residential buildings. However it is a matter for individual housing owners and landlords to decide if automatic fire suppression is required as part of their fire safety strategy based on their fire risk assessment.'

As if that weren't enough, in May 2013 Knight wrote a further, widely criticised [report](#) recommending £200m worth of cuts to the fire service. Since then, Brandon Lewis, in his

role as Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Services, repeatedly [used](#) Knight's report to deflect questions about government cuts to fire safety budgets.

The Grenfell Tower community has not been alone in expressing its doubt that anyone who looks for justice from three government-appointed officials with such histories of injustice and even cruelty will look in vain. However, there is another issue, which is broader than the integrity or records of the individuals appointed to the public inquiry.

In the face of the mounting evidence of corruption at every level of involvement in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower it is important to distinguish between individual and systemic corruption. As an example of the former, the blog of the [Grenfell Action Group](#) has revealed that Councillor Feilding-Mellen, in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Regeneration, was ultimately responsible for Kensington and Chelsea council's 2015 decision to lease North Kensington Library to Notting Hill Prep School, thereby taking it out of public control and use. However, at the time of this deal – which was strongly opposed by the local community – Feilding-Mellen had two children on the long waiting list for the £5,800-a-term private school, which as part of the deal was allowed to skip the first year's rent of £365,000. This is just another example – of which the Grenfell Action Group blog exposes many – of the way individuals in positions of authority on Kensington and Chelsea council and the Tenant Management Organisation have used that authority for their own personal benefit.

The corruption that led to the Grenfell Tower fire, however, is of another kind. Even to call it 'corruption' is not strictly accurate, as to do so would imply that its workings are corrupting an otherwise uncorrupt system; when what the Grenfell Tower fire is revealing to those who didn't know already is that the system that produced this disaster works by corruption. The corruption that has embraced everyone from the manufacturers of flammable insulation for people's homes, to the architects that included it in a cladding system the Fire Brigade had issued warnings about, to the contractors that undercut their competitors to win the refurbishment contract, to the subcontractors that installed it on Grenfell Tower, to the project managers that cut costs with residents' safety, to the Tenant Management Organisation that demanded those cuts, to the council that profited from them, to the ministers who sat on reviews of fire safety regulations in tower blocks, all the way up to the council leaders and housing ministers of the political parties – both Conservative and Labour alike – as well as the London Mayor, that have promoted an estate regeneration programme that places increased land values for local authorities and the profits of private contractors over residents' needs and safety – is quite clearly not a 'regrettable chain' of instances of individual failings – as the public inquiry will doubtless find – but rather an example of the same systemic corruption that has produced the housing crisis from which so many private companies and public servants are profiting at the expense and lives of residents like those in Grenfell Tower, and in which the public inquiry has been called to help restore the public's confidence. As such, although every individual culpable in this lethal

chain of greed and criminal negligence should be arrested, tried and, if found guilty, sentenced – rather than, as is currently happening, being allowed to resign on a severance package – simply removing them from their positions – as in fact has already been done at Kensington and Chelsea council – will do little or nothing to stop the same systemic corruption that threatens the homes and lives of hundreds of thousands of estate residents across the UK.

Police surveillance is a constant if you live on a council estate, in the helicopters that hover overhead, in the armed squads that patrol the grounds, in the threats stuck up on every noticeboard, in the strip lighting that turns every walkway into a high-security prison, in the CCTV cameras that record your every move. In contrast, those responsible for the Grenfell Tower fire have been left free to destroy the records of their culpability, and every witness and suspect can deflect public questions about their responsibility with the excuse of ‘not wanting to prejudice the Public Inquiry’, while politicians, corporate CEOs, BBC directors, newspaper editors, police commissioners and high court judges agree in advance exactly which minor official will be the scapegoat. Incredibly, the only people to be arrested so far in relation to this fire are a [man](#) who, finding a body bag left outside his front door, took photographs and footage of the partially exposed body and posted them on social media; and another [man](#) who tried to claim financial support by falsely claiming he had lost his wife and son in the fire. Both were insensitive and reprehensible acts, no doubt, but hardly comparable to the actions of Councillor Rock Feilding-Mellen, whom the police appear more intent on [protecting](#) than arresting.

The first thing the announcement of a Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire has done – long before it is due to convene this September – is to have removed all transparency and accountability for the investigation from public scrutiny and placed it in the hands of the very people who are responsible for this crime. As we have indicated throughout this report, much of the information gathered here is no longer available on the websites of the private companies and public bodies involved. The same chain of corruption that led to hundreds of residents burning to death because rich people didn’t want to acknowledge their existence is being repeated in the chain of secrecy that will – like every public inquiry before it – absolve the links in that chain of all responsibility for those deaths. In this respect as in so many others, the Grenfell Tower fire is like a mirror: the political decisions that created the conditions for the disaster are being reflected in our responses to it. We believe that one of the ways we can honour the memory of the dead is to identify and change the system that caused their deaths. If we don’t, this will not be the last loss of life we see on London’s council estates.

Grenfell Tower Inquest

In response to the government’s announcement of a Public Inquiry there have been [criticisms](#) of both the time it is likely to take, the fact that its terms of reference have been set by the same people who are responsible for the disaster, and especially that it

will not lead to criminal proceedings. This has led to the Grenfell Tower community calling for a coroner's inquest, such as the one carried out after the Lakanal House fire. Unlike a public inquiry, an inquest is part of a legal investigation carried out by a coroner, the scope of which is to establish who, where, when and how a person or persons died. As such, its scope is narrower than that of a public inquiry. Unlike an inquiry, an inquest must be open to public scrutiny to a degree sufficient to ensure accountability. Coroners will identify 'properly interested persons' – which could be family members of the deceased – and allow them to question a witness; but they are not guaranteed full legal representation or funding. Sometimes a coroner will carry out the inquest alone and on other occasions they will call a jury to decide. However, a coroner cannot attribute criminal liability, but can only make recommendations, and they have no power to enforce these recommendations. Under the Inquiries Act, a Minister has the power to suspend an inquiry in order not to prejudice the determination of any civil or criminal liability; while a coroner must suspend an investigation when certain criminal investigations are brought. After the inquest, the coroner will make a statement about the cause of death, with descriptions ranging from accidental death – the verdict returned in 1991 by the Hillsborough Inquest, which it took more than 27 years to overturn – to misadventure, lawful killing, unlawful killing or an open verdict.

In response to a question asked in Parliament in December 2009 about when an inquiry instead of a coroner's inquest will be established in circumstances where an inquest would normally be held, Lord Bach, who was then Parliamentary Under-secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice, replied:

'The criteria for considering the establishment of an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005, when a coroner's inquest cannot be held, will be the existence of highly sensitive matters – including, for example, intercept material – which are directly relevant to the purpose of the inquest, and which may not be disclosed either to a coroner or a coroner's jury, and where there is no alternative way of ensuring the matters are protected from public disclosure.'

It seems that, whether by public inquiry or coroner's inquest, the truth about Grenfell Tower is unlikely to be revealed soon, if ever. This raises the question of what the community itself can do, independently of the authorities who, at council and government level, have failed them. Increasingly, residents on estates threatened with regeneration by equally unaccountable authorities unchecked by government legislation have started proposing their own alternatives to demolition under the name of a 'People's Plan'. Architects for Social Housing has designed several such design alternatives for the [West Kensington and Gibbs Green](#) and [Central Hill](#) estates, to name just two. While the public inquiry to which the public is barred deliberates on what terms of reference it feels inclined to investigate, now might be the time to set up a

'People's Inquiry' in order to address in public the question so many people are demanding be answered: who is responsible for the Grenfell Tower fire?

In writing this report, it has become apparent to us that in the circumlocution office of responsibility for this disaster there have been individuals who have acted morally, who knew that such a fire would happen – in Grenfell Tower or on another estate – and who tried to prevent it with warnings and recommendations. Among these are the coroner on the inquest into the Lakanal House fire, the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group, and the London Fire Brigade. But all their warnings and recommendations have fallen on the deaf ears of politicians and civil servants who have shown neither morality nor responsibility, each and every one of whom should be investigated and questioned about their role in this disaster. Those politicians who are subsequently trying to make political capital out of this disaster are, in our opinion, no less lacking in morality if not responsibility.

Between these two camps – the experts whose job is to prevent such a disaster from happening, and the politicians whose job is to promote estate regeneration and redevelopment no matter what the cost to the homes and safety of the residents that live on them – is the third party in this disaster: the private contractors and consultants employed to design, manufacture, build and manage the regeneration process, who at every step were under pressure from the client – and who in turn placed pressure on their subcontractors – to cut costs that incrementally created this 'disaster waiting to happen'. But whereas politicians, civil servants, coroners and fire-safety experts are – at least theoretically – there to ensure the safety of the citizens over which they have jurisdiction, the subcontractors that built this death trap have obligations only to their shareholders. Their bottom line is profit, not safety; and it is indicative of the inversion of these priorities in UK housing in general, and in the estate regeneration programme in particular, that the fire-safety conditions inside Grenfell Tower that placed residents at risk, which they complained about for over three years, and which required urgent maintenance and refurbishment, were ignored by the council and the Tenant Management Organisation; whereas the appearance of the tower from the outside that had been identified as artificially depressing the potential residual land values in the area received nearly £8.7 million for a face lift.

This does not mean that the links in the chain of culpability that starts at the suppliers of flammable cladding to a high-rise tower and links together every private company that contributed to it becoming the Grenfell Tower conflagration is free of responsibility. But that they are responsible for the deaths of the residents is because they were placed in this position by the continuation of that chain through the hands of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation and Council, and from there all the way up to the Department of Communities and Local Government that placed the deregulation of fire safety standards – which in their eyes represented an unnecessary obstacle to the profits to be made from the UK housing boom – above the safety of residents, and the

political parties, both Conservative and Labour, who at council, mayoral and ministerial level have unreservedly promoted the programme of estate regeneration that killed the residents of Grenfell Tower.

This is a starting list of the more than 60 individuals we believe should be immediately arrested by the police and their records seized, investigated for their role in the Grenfell Tower fire, and where necessary put on trial in a criminal court:

Private contractors and consultants on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment

- Mark Allen, Technical Director of Celotex, and member of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee
- Deborah French, UK Sales Manager, Arconic
- Ray Bailey, Managing Director, Harley Facades
- Bob Holt, Director and Executive Chairman of Lakehouse services
- Bob Greene, Technical Contract Manager, RGE Services
- Roger Greene, Managing Director, RGE Services
- Chris Train, Chief Executive, Cadent Gas
- Andrew McQuatt, Partner, Max Fordham engineering, and Lead Engineer on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment
- Mark Palmer, Senior Partner, Max Fordham engineering, and Senior Engineer on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment
- David Lloyd Jones, Founding Director of Studio E Architects
- Andrzej Kuszell, Founding Director of Studio E Architects, and lead architect on the Grenfell Tower refurbishment
- Mark Mitchener, Managing Director, Rydon Construction
- Jeff Henton, Managing Director, Rydon Maintenance, and Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Robert Bond, Group Chief Executive, Rydon, and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Building
- Philip James Boulcott, Director and Chartered Quantity Surveyor, Artelia UK
- Ian Bailey, Director and Public Sector Lead, Artelia UK

Board Members and directors of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation

- Simon Brissenden, independent Board Member, KCTMO
- Anthony Preiskel, independent Board Member, KCTMO and Non-Executive Director of the Homes and Communities Agency
- Paula France, council-nominated Board Member, KCTMO
- Judith Blakeman, Labour councillor and council-nominated Board Member, KCTMO

- Maighread Condon-Simmonds, Conservative councillor and council-nominated Board Member, KCTMO
- Fay Edward, Chair and Resident Board Member of the KCTMO
- Claire Williams, Project Manager on Grenfell Tower refurbishment, KCTMO
- Laura Johnson, Director of Housing, KCTMO
- Sacha Jevans, Executive Director of Operations at the KCTMO
- Yvonne Birch, Executive Director of People and Performance at the KCTMO
- Barbara Matthews, Executive Director of Financial Services and Information and Communication Technology at the KCTMO
- Robert Black, former Chief Executive of the KCTMO

Councillors and officers on Kensington and Chelsea council

- John Allen, Building Inspector, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council
- Vimal Sarna, Senior Solicitor at Legal Services, RBKC
- Michael Clark, Director for Corporate Property and Customer Services, RBKC
- Jonathan Bore, Executive Director for Planning and Borough Development, RBKC
- Nicholas Holgate, former Chief Executive and Town Clerk, RBKC
- Elizabeth Rutherford, former Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Adrian Berrill-Cox, former Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Eve Allison, Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Will Pascal, Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Matthew Palmer, Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Kim Taylor-Smith, Member of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee and current Deputy Leader, RBKC
- Tony Holt, former Vice-chairman of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- David Nicholls, Vice-chairman of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Quentin Marshall, former Chairman of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Sam Mackover, Chairman of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, RBKC
- Ruth Angel, Senior Project Manager in Housing Regeneration, RBKC
- Catherine Faulks, former Cabinet Member for Education and Libraries, RBKC
- Emma Will, former Cabinet Member for Family and Children's Services and current Cabinet Member for Education and Libraries, RBKC
- Paul Warrick, former Cabinet Member for Facilities Management and Procurement Policy, RBKC
- Timothy Coleridge, former Cabinet Member for Environment, Environmental Health, Leisure and Arts, RBKC

- Mary Weale, former Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, RBKC
- Tim Ahern, former Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Transport, Kensington and Chelsea council, RBKC
- Warwick Lightfoot, former Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy, RBKC
- Gerard Hargreaves, former Cabinet Member for Civil Society and Community Safety and current Chief Whip, RBKC
- Marie-Therese Ross, Mayor, RBKC
- Rock Feilding-Mellen, former Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Regeneration, RBKC
- Nicholas Paget-Brown, former Leader, RBKC

Members of Parliament and civil servants

- Stephen Kelly, Chief Operating Officer for Government and Head of the Efficiency and Reform Group
- Brian Martin, Principal Construction Professional in the Building Regulations and Standards Division in the Department of Communities and Local Government
- Andrew Stunell, Construction Spokesperson in the House of Lords and former Parliamentary Under-secretary of State in the Department of Communities and Local Government
- Ken Knight, Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for England
- Richard Blakeway, Chief Adviser to the Housing and Urban Regeneration Unit at Policy Exchange, and Board Director at the Homes and Communities Agency
- Stephen Williams, former Liberal Democrat MP and Parliamentary Under-secretary of State in the Department of Communities and Local Government
- James Wharton, Conservative MP, Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for International Development and former Parliamentary Under-secretary of State in the Department of Communities and Local Government
- Oliver Letwin, Conservative MP, former Minister of State for Government Policy and current Chair of the Red Tape Initiative
- Eric Pickles, Conservative MP, United Kingdom Special Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues and former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Gavin Barwell, Conservative MP, Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Theresa May and former Minister of State for Housing and Planning
- Brandon Lewis, Conservative MP, Minister of State for Immigration and former Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Services

In addition, we believe the Leaders, Cabinet Ministers for Housing and Regeneration, Chairs of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, Chief Executives and Executive Directors of every council that has fitted inflammable and potentially deadly cladding on over 600 tower blocks in the UK as part of estate regeneration schemes should be questioned; as should the Ministers of State for Housing for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal

Democrat Parties, and the London Mayor; as well as the Chairs of the think-tanks and CEOs and Managing Directors of the property developers, builders, estate agents and architectural practices involved in promoting and implementing the programme of estate regeneration. Only then will we be able to establish how many tower blocks on how many estates are living in what Sadiq Khan called potential 'death traps', carry out the actions necessary to ensure the safety of residents, and in doing so put a stop to the estate regeneration programme whose motivations, mechanisms and consequences for residents – not only those whose lives it has already taken, but also those whose homes it threatens – the inferno of Grenfell Tower has illuminated for all to see.

Grenfell Tower Legacy

When the bodies of the dead have still not been recovered, the survivors of this disaster have still not been rehoused, and the community of North Kensington is still in mourning, it might be argued that now is too early to talk about the future. However, while we mourn and wait on a Public Inquiry that will take years to draw its inevitable conclusions, the perpetrators of this disaster are acting, not only to cover their responsibility and culpability, but to determine the future of Grenfell Tower – what Sadiq Khan called the 'legacy' of the fire. Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has placed Kensington and Chelsea council's housing, regeneration, community engagement and governance services under a [Grenfell Fire Response Team](#), which is led by a group of chief executives from councils across London. The spokesperson for this team is Eleanor Kelly, the Chief Executive at Southwark Labour council, which has perhaps the worst track record of any council in London for demolishing estates, relocating their communities outside the borough, and redeveloping the land as high-value properties for investment by overseas and offshore companies. This is the clearest indication of how the government intends to capitalise on the Grenfell Tower fire.

In response to the disaster, the Conservative government of Theresa May has pledged £5,500 in emergency funds for every household that lost their home in the fire. In contrast to this miserly sum, the public has been hugely [generous](#). In addition to an estimated 174 tonnes of donated items, which are being handled and distributed by the British Red Cross, an estimated £20 million in cash has been donated, with £5.5 million from the London Community Foundation/Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund; £5.1 million from the Kensington & Chelsea Foundation; £4.7 million from the British Red Cross; £4 million from more than 700 individual appeals on the websites like JustGiving and GoFundMe; and £500,000 from four Muslim charities. However, as of 18 July only £800,000 of that money has been distributed, and a tiny £158,000, less than 0.8 per cent of the total, to a mere 16 survivors from the Grenfell Tower fire. It is crucial that the donated funds are not siphoned off by Kensington and Chelsea council, predatory charities and legal firms or property developers with an eye on the land from which the ruin of Grenfell Tower will be dismantled.

What the Grenfell Tower fire has exposed is that the separation between the public and private spheres in UK housing no longer exists in any qualifiable sense, and any trust that the duties of the former is independent of the interests of the latter has no foundation in practice. From our work with council estate communities trying to save their homes, and from our own experience of living on council estate tower blocks, ASH has become increasingly interested in the potential of a third sphere of activity, which is neither public nor private. What those commentators on council estates who live – to use Andrew Gimson’s description – in their ‘little terraced houses’ do not understand is that the most important space on a council estate does not fall into the clear distinction between private and public that terrace-dwellers cross every time they step outside their home and into the street. In seeking to recreate the street life of working-class communities, post-war council estates designed communal spaces into their architecture. These include not only the community halls in which residents meet – and which because of this are always the first part of the estate to be shut down by councils intent on demolishing it – but the internal hallways and external walkways between individual homes; the numerous landings outside lifts; the lifts themselves – where in the few seconds it takes to ascend or descend relationships with neighbours are made and maintained; and above all in the entrance halls – in many cases later additions to address the teething problems of this new form of communal living – and in which the concierge, known to every resident and therefore knowing every resident, is the presiding spirit of the estate, setting the tone for its cordiality, its fraternity and its ethos of mutual support.

All of this is unknown to the dwellers in privately-owned homes and fenced-in gardens; but it is where the collective life of a council estate takes root and grows. Most importantly, it is a space which is neither private, and therefore subject to the property or tenant rights of the individual or household, nor public, and therefore the province of the council. Rather, it is a collective space, over which no resident has rights, which none of them own, but for which they all take responsibility and share in its benefits. As the corruption of the public sphere by the private accelerates under increasingly accommodating government policy, mayoral direction and council practice, and the lives of those under the management and care of these public bodies are increasingly put at risk of eviction, homelessness and even death, ASH believes this third sphere, the space and activity of community, must be reclaimed.

Once the charred skeleton of Grenfell Tower is buried and the land cleared for redevelopment, it will still be in the hands of Kensington and Chelsea council. Worse still, the fire has brought about precisely that demolition of the ‘blight’ that Grenfell Tower, in the eyes of the council and the TMO, represented, freeing up the land it stands on for the potential residual values the original masterplan for the Lancaster West estate envisaged activating through its redevelopment as ‘high end’ properties for home ownership and capital investment. Were this to come about – and under existing

ownership and policy there is nothing to stop it happening – it would be the greatest betrayal of both the dead and the survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire.

To oppose this, therefore, ASH proposes that a portion of the £20 million donated by the general public – and which the government should be invited to match – be used to purchase the land on which Grenfell Tower stands and place it in Trust for the survivors and the surrounding community; and that in its place housing is built that is neither owned by the council nor run by the KCTMO, but owned and managed as a Community Land Trust or Housing Co-operative by the residents themselves. From the ashes of Grenfell Tower, and the forces of private greed and public corruption that burnt it to the ground, a new Community estate could rise – as a home for the homeless of Grenfell Tower, and as a model of communal housing for the hundreds of thousands of Londoners currently threatened by the programme of estate regeneration.

In Memoriam

The [official figures](#) from the Metropolitan Police Force are that 255 people escaped from Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire and around 80 died. This last figure is a rough estimate based on the ongoing forensic investigation by the Disaster Victim Identification unit that has so far made 87 'recoveries' of human remains. Police have been able to speak to residents who lived in 106 of the flats in Grenfell Tower, and to establish how many people were in them at the time of the fire. 18 of the identified deaths were from these flats. The remaining 62 deaths were from what the Met say are 23 flats between the 11th and 23rd floors of the building whose residents they have been unable to trace. On 14 June, 26 separate 999 calls to the London Fire Brigade were made from people who said they were inside one of these 23 flats. Pending the Public Inquiry the Met records are not available to the public, but these figures are based on what they say were the 129 flats in Grenfell Tower, whereas according to the 2012 planning application the building would have contained 127 flats after its refurbishment. We hope this is a misunderstanding on our behalf and not theirs.

These official figures, however, have been consistently [questioned](#) by the local community, whose members argue that a total of 335 residents in 227 bedrooms doesn't reflect what they know about the density of occupation in Grenfell Tower – which they say housed many unregistered residents – or the many visitors they argue would have been present when the fire broke out shortly before 1am during the month of Ramadan, and the numerous Muslim residents and their neighbours would have been having their late-night meal and prayers before the next day's fast.

As of 20 July, 40 people have been [formally identified](#) by the Met in agreement with the Westminster Coroner, Dr. Fiona Wilcox. At the request of their families, 22 of these identified people have not been named. The Met has not yet been able to identify the other remains, or anyone else who might have been present in what Dave Barclay, the former head of the Physical Evidence unit at the National Crime Faculty, has said would effectively have been a crematorium, with temperatures up to 2,000 degrees centigrade at the top of Grenfell Tower.

In writing this report we have tried to remain as objective as possible in the face of this terrible disaster, and never to presume to speak on behalf of, or in place of, the residents and community directly affected by the Grenfell Tower fire. We offer this report to them in the hope that it will aid them in their struggle for some form of justice, and their search for the truth about why this fire happened. Since we have named those we hold accountable for their deaths, we will end by naming those they killed whose names their families have made public, and who must stand here for those who are unnamed, those who are still missing, and those who will never appear on any list of the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire:

- Mohammad Alhajali, a 23-year-old man
- Ya-Haddy Sisi Saye, also known as Khadija Saye, a 24-year-old woman
- Anthony Disson, a 65-year-old man
- Abufars Ibrahim, a 39-year-old man
- Khadija Khalloufi, a 52-year-old woman
- Mary Mendy, a 52-year-old woman
- Abdeslam Sebbar, a 77-year-old man
- Isaac Paulos, a five-year-old boy
- Sheila, an 80-year-old woman
- Gloria Trevisan, a 26-year-old woman
- Marco Gottardi, a 27-year-old man
- Berkti Haftom, a 29-year-old woman
- Zainab Deen, a 32-year-old woman
- Hamid Kani, a 61-year-old man
- Yahya Hashim, a 13-year-old boy
- Ali Jafari, an 82-year-old man
- Majorie Vital, a 68-year-old woman
- Logan Gomes, who was stillborn in hospital on 14 June

In memoriam.

Architects for Social Housing