

Grenfell Fire Safety Improvements Not Being Paid For By Whitehall As Promised, Councils Claim

huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/grenfell-fire-safety-councils_uk_59d8aedbe4b046f5ad987348

Jack Sommers Assistant News Editor, HuffPost UK

10/7/2017

Councils have said Whitehall is refusing to meet promises to fund basic fire safety improvements like sprinklers needed after [the Grenfell Tower tragedy](#).

Local authorities claim that funding measures from their own budgets would mean less money to invest in new council homes or pay for running repairs on existing stock, [the Press Association reports](#).

Jane Urquhart, who holds the housing portfolio on Nottingham City Council, said the works planned on high-rises in her area were considered “additional rather than essential” by the Department for Communities and Local Government.



Sajid Javid's Department for Communities And Local Government is refusing to meet promises to fund fire safety improvements, councils claim

“We found that really difficult to understand given that in the refurbishment of the Houses of Parliament sprinklers are considered essential, so we thought it was quite incredible that they were essential for the Houses of Parliament but not essential for residents of high-rises,” she told The Today programme.

The Labour councillor said: “Safety must come at the top of the list and the works that we have considered will be done; the impact will be that fewer new homes will be built and our other housing will not have the repairs that it needs.”

Adam Hug, leader of the Labour opposition group on Westminster City Council, said his authority faced similar problems getting money from Communities Secretary Sajid Javid's department to pay for the installation of sprinklers and removal of cladding.

“Ultimately these are things that the London Fire Brigade says have to be done and ultimately the cost is having to be borne by the housing revenue account, which is tenants’ rents and service charge fees,” he told Today.

“Councils across the country are asking the Government for the help that Sajid Javid promised and they are being told ‘no, only in exceptional circumstances when you literally don’t have the money in any form’.”

He said Westminster stood to lose about £20 million to pay for the work: “That means either 100 affordable homes can’t get built or it means that for 20 or 30 years our residents are going to not have their damp dealt with, when things break not being repaired.”

He added: “It’s a national civil emergency across the country, councils have complied with the regulations that have been there and the Government is not stepping up to the plate.”

[The Guardian reported](#) that other councils, including Croydon and Wandsworth, had also had requests for funding declined.

A DCLG spokesman said: “Public safety is paramount which is why, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Government established a comprehensive building safety programme to ensure a fire like this can never happen again.

“This included commissioning an independent review of building regulations and fire safety. We will consider this issue in light of the recommendations of this review and the findings of the public inquiry.

“Building owners are responsible for funding measures designed to make a building safe. We’ve been clear that where a local authority has concerns about funding essential fire safety measures, they should contact DCLG as soon as possible to discuss their position.

“The department has written to Nottingham, Croydon and Wandsworth councils inviting them to provide more detail about the works they propose. To date these authorities have not submitted this information.”

AOL, The Huffington Post and our partners use cookies for a variety of purposes, including collecting information about site usage, content management, providing customized content and ads, and traffic measurement and analysis. By continuing to use this site, or by clicking "I Agree", you agree to the use of cookies. Please review our **cookie policy** for more information or to opt-out from the use of cookies.

I Agree



Welcome, [Sign in](#)
[Sign up](#) | [Options](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Sport](#) [Money](#) [Entertainment](#) [Living](#) [Travel](#) [Cars](#) [Games](#) [Weather](#)

[UK](#) [Politics](#) [World](#) [Featured](#) [HuffPost](#)

Whitehall not funding fire safety work promised after Grenfell, say councils

By [PA](#) 7 Oct 2017, 10:55
Updated: 7 Oct 2017, 11:00



MOST WATCHED

Rouhani fires back at Trump on Iran nuclear deal



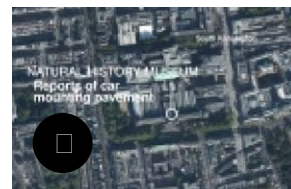


Councils have claimed Whitehall is refusing to meet promises to fund fire safety improvements in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Local authorities claim that funding measures such as the installation of sprinklers from their own budgets would mean less money to invest in new council homes or pay for running repairs on existing stock.

Jane Urquhart, who holds the housing portfolio on Nottingham City Council, said the works planned on high-rises in her area were considered "additional rather than essential" by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

"We found that really difficult to understand given that in the refurbishment of the Houses of Parliament sprinklers are considered essential, so we thought it was quite incredible that they were essential for the Houses of Parliament but not essential for residents of high-rises," she told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.



Man arrested after car hits pedestrians near Natural History Museum
- Locator map



Spaniards rally amid rising independence tensions



Several people injured in car incident near London museum



South Africa: Young entrepreneurs hope to curb unemployment

LET US SEND YOU OUR
NEWSLETTER

Our editors will email you a roundup of their favourite stories from across AOL

FOLLOW US

Follow



Communities Secretary Sajid Javid (David Mirzoeff/PA)

The Labour councillor said: "Safety must come at the top of the list and the works that we have considered will be done; the impact will be that fewer new homes will be built and our other housing will not have the repairs that it needs."

Adam Hug, leader of the Labour opposition group on Westminster City Council, said his authority faced similar problems getting money from Communities Secretary Sajid Javid's department to pay for the installation of sprinklers and removal of cladding.

"Ultimately these are things that the London Fire Brigade says have to be done and ultimately the cost is having to be borne by the housing revenue account, which is tenants' rents and service charge fees," he said.

"Councils across the country are asking the Government for the help that Sajid Javid promised and they are being told 'no, only in exceptional circumstances when you literally don't have the money in any form'."

He said Westminster stood to lose about £20 million to pay for the work: "That means either 100 affordable homes can't get built or it means that for 20 or 30 years our residents are going to not have their damp dealt with, when things break not being repaired."

He added: "It's a national civil emergency across the country, councils have complied with the regulations that have been there and the Government is not stepping up to the plate."

The Guardian reported that other councils, including Croydon and Wandsworth, had also had requests for funding declined.

A DCLG spokesman said: "Public safety is paramount which is why, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Government established a comprehensive building safety programme to ensure a fire like this can never happen again.

"This included commissioning an independent review of building regulations and fire safety. We will consider this issue in light of the recommendations of this review and the findings of the public inquiry.

"Building owners are responsible for funding measures designed to make a building safe. We've been clear that where a local authority has concerns about funding essential fire safety measures, they should contact DCLG as soon as possible to discuss their position.

"The department has written to Nottingham, Croydon and Wandsworth councils inviting them to provide more detail about the works they propose. To date these authorities have not submitted this information."

SUGGEST A CORRECTION

LET US SEND YOU OUR NEWSLETTER


Our editors will email you a roundup of their favourite stories from across AOL

RECOMMENDED EBAY PRODUCTS (20)

Explore Today's

Featured Collections

SHOP NOW



Travel Canvas Sport Rucksack Camping School...
£19.90



15 P... Spor... Sole...
£7.45



MORE FROM THE WEB



News

AOL Newsletter. Roundups of the best across AOL, hand picked by our editors and delivered to your inbox.

- About AOL

AOL UK Terms of Use

Cookie Policy

Advertising Contact

RSS

About Our Ads
- Contact

Privacy Policy

Feedback

Help

AOL App

Supply Chain Transparency

become a
supporter

subscribe ☐ find a job
news ☐ opinion ☐ sport ☐ arts ☐ life



UK ☐ UK politics ☐ Education ☐ Media ☐ Society ☐ Law ☐ Scotland ☐ more

Housing

Ministers 'refusing to pay for fire safety measures' after Grenfell

Councils accuse government of washing its hands of problem after earlier promising that money would be no object



Grenfell Tower in north Kensington. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/Reuters

[Share on Facebook](#) [Share on Twitter](#) [Share via Email](#)

Robert Booth

Friday 6 October 2017
17.33 BST

Councils have said the government is failing to release funds to improve the fire safety of dozens of tower blocks following the Grenfell Tower disaster despite promising that a lack of financial resources should not stand in the way of essential works.

Ministers have said building owners are responsible for funding safety measures, but town hall leaders complain that they are “washing their hands of their responsibilities” and are being “dismissive”, four months after the blaze at the Kensington tower block, which [claimed about 80 lives](#).

The government has said it will consider help “where works are essential”, but has so far resisted bids for support to retrofit sprinklers in towers despite the [London](#) fire brigade (LFB) saying this must happen.

The Conservative-run Westminster council is understood to be the latest town hall to have had a request for financial assistance pushed back by ministers. It is removing cladding from six high-rise towers and wants to install sprinklers across other tall council blocks at an estimated cost of £20m.

The housing minister, Alok Sharma, has already declined Nottingham city council’s request for help to install sprinklers inside flats and communal areas in 13 towers at a cost of £6.2m. Sharma told the council: “The fire safety measures you outline are additional rather than essential.”

He has told the London borough of Croydon, which wants to spend £10m on retrofitting sprinklers to 25 tall residential blocks: “It is the landlord’s responsibility to ensure that people are safe.”

Wandsworth wants to spend up to £30m on sprinklers in 100 towers but has been told: “Support will not include general improvement and enhancements to buildings.” All the councils said they had been advised to carry out works by their local fire brigades.

The tension over who should foot the fire safety bill follows a pledge in July by the communities secretary, Sajid Javid, that any lack of financial resources would not prevent necessary works going ahead. However, the government appears determined not to fund or allow additional borrowing for any improvements that go beyond essential safety works. The necessity of sprinklers is proving a key faultline.

Dany Cotton, commissioner of the LFB, has said retrofitting sprinklers in tower blocks “can’t be optional, it can’t be a nice-to-have”. Since 2007 they have been compulsory in new-build high-rises over 30 metres tall in England, but those building regulations do not apply to older blocks.

The Department for [Communities](#) and Local Government (DCLG) argues that an appropriate level of fire safety can be achieved without the need to retrofit sprinklers, and fitting them is a matter for landlords to consider for themselves.

A [recent study](#) of 677 fires where sprinklers were activated found they controlled or extinguished the fire in 99% of cases.

The nationwide bill for replacing flammable cladding and retrofitting sprinklers is already likely to run into hundreds of millions of pounds. Southwark has previously estimated that the bill for installing sprinklers in its towers could be as high as £100m, and it is currently finalising its bid for funding. The council leader, Peter John, has told Javid: “Fire safety is a national issue and the financial burden for these works must not fall on already stretched councils.”

Birmingham city council, the UK’s largest council landlord, is yet to submit a request for retrofitting sprinklers in up to 213 blocks.

So far, 31 town halls have asked for government help to make high-rise flats safe. The DCLG said it was in detailed discussions with six, and others had been invited to provide further information about how the work they wished to undertake was essential.

In Salford, the city council has borrowed £25m to fund works to remove potentially flammable cladding from nine towers, and leaders have accused the government of “failing to live up to its responsibility”.

“Like many other councils, Salford is lobbying the government to recognise the huge financial cost of this national issue and provide funding to us and other local authorities to deal with it,” said the deputy city mayor, John Merry.

Pressed on funding at the Conservative party conference in Manchester this week, Theresa May said: “We have said we would work with local authorities on any adaptations and changes they needed to make to ensure the safety of those tower blocks.”

But asked about funding sprinklers, she said: “There’s a number of issues that can improve the safety of tower blocks. It is not just one answer.”

Jane Urquart, the cabinet member for housing at Nottingham city council, said: “The

government said a lot of things after the tragedy about money not being an object to ensuring safety. Now councils like ours, which have faced huge cuts over the last few years, are being told to dig into our pockets. The consequence of the government not paying is that other repairs to our housing stock won't happen."

Adam Hug, leader of the Labour opposition at Westminster city council, said he had seen correspondence with the government detailing the council's request for financial aid or better flexibility on borrowing.

"Both were being asked for," he said. "They were told: only in exceptional circumstances. Yet again it will be council tenants and people who desperately need new homes who are left to pay the price of this Tory government washing their hands of their responsibilities."

A spokeswoman for Westminster said it was "in ongoing discussions with the DCLG about a range of fire safety-related issues". The DCLG said it had told Westminster it would consider removing financial restrictions where barriers stood in the way of essential works being done.

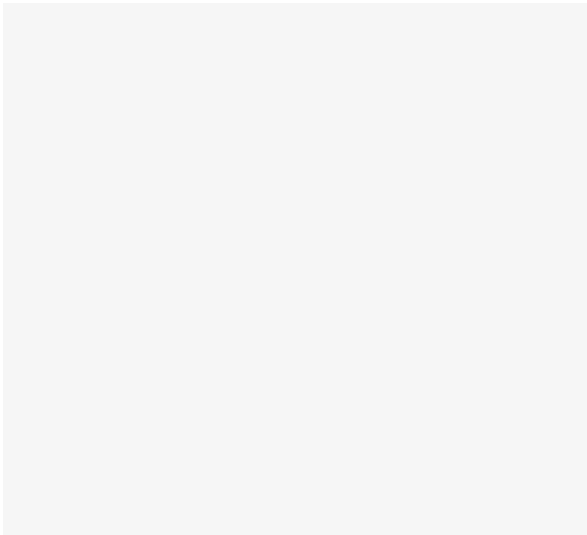
"Building owners are responsible for funding measures designed to make a building safe," said a spokesman for the department. "We've been clear that where a local authority has concerns about funding essential fire safety measures, they should contact DCLG as soon as possible to discuss their position. The department has written to Nottingham, Croydon and Wandsworth councils inviting them to provide more detail about the works they propose. To date these authorities have not submitted this information."

Topics

- [Housing](#)
- [Local government](#)
- [Grenfell Tower fire](#)
- [Social housing](#)
- [London](#)
- [Communities](#)
- [news](#)

[Reuse this content](#)

most viewed



back to top



UK	education media society law scotland wales northern ireland
politics	
world	europe US americas asia australia africa middle east cities development
sport	football cricket rugby union F1 tennis golf cycling boxing racing rugby league US sports
football	live scores tables competitions results fixtures clubs
opinion	columnists letters editorials
culture	film tv & radio music games books art & design stage classical
business	economics banking retail markets eurozone business to business
lifestyle	food recipes health & fitness love & sex family women home & garden
fashion	
environment	climate change wildlife energy pollution
tech	
travel	UK europe US

money	property savings pensions borrowing careers
science	
professional	
the observer	
today's paper	obituaries g2 weekend the guide saturday review
sunday's paper	comment the new review observer magazine
membership	
crosswords	blog editor quick cryptic prize quiptic genius speedy everyman azed weekend
video	podcasts
digital archive	

[uk news](#) › [society](#) › [housing](#)

Sign up to our daily email

Email address

- [jobs](#)
- [dating](#)
- [become a supporter](#)
- [make a contribution](#)
- [Guardian labs](#)

- [about us](#)
- [work for us](#)
- [advertise with us](#)
- [contact us](#)
- [ask for help](#)

[terms & conditions](#)

- [privacy policy](#)
- [cookie policy](#)
- [securedrop](#)
- [digital newspaper archive](#)
- [complaints & corrections](#)

- [all topics](#)
- [all contributors](#)
- [modern slavery act](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [subscribe](#)

© 2017 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.