

LABOUR GROUP AMENDMENT TO THE OPPOSITION MOTION FOR DEBATE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP – REGARDING FIRE SAFETY & THE SECURITY OF THE HOUSING SECTOR IN TOWER HAMLETS

Proposer: Councillor Sirajul Islam

Seconded: Councillor Eve McQuillan

Inserted text underlined and deleted text scored out.

This Council notes:

Shortly after the Grenfell fire, the council wrote to the owners and managing agents of over 700 private sector tall buildings.

Following responses from landlords and further investigations by officers the council identified 39 private sector residential buildings with ACM and a further 10 under investigation.

Council officers are in liaison with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, the Greater London Authority, and London Councils on this matter.

That 282 buildings in Tower Hamlets have registered for the government's £1bn building safety fund to fix cladding issues. That the local authorities with the next highest numbers of affected buildings were Manchester with 136 buildings, 130 in Newham, 127 in Westminster, 126 in Southwark, 102 in Greenwich.

That this list does not include most housing association properties which have a separate application process.

That this list also does not include other buildings with non-ACM cladding issues but where there are other fire safety issues. And it also does not include any building under 18 meters in height.

~~It is therefore probable that the total number of buildings affected by fire safety issues in Tower Hamlets may be between 300 and 400. Tens of thousands of residents must be affected by this.~~

~~That there is almost no information in the public domain about which buildings are affected except for some examples quoted in Council documents (Maltings and Brewster) or where residents have advertised their problems.~~

~~That some of these buildings were built by developers still active in the Borough although some buildings affected were built decades ago.~~

Tower Hamlets Council officers meet weekly to monitor progress with the remediation of blocks with ACM and the work of this group has widened to include collating the results of the External Wall Systems Survey (EWS).

In respect of EWS, the council has written to over 800 building owners and has

received 673 replies to the online survey. All returns from building owners are being entered on to a Government database which is checked by government and the council, with council officers undertaking further checks where more investigation is needed.

The NLA Tall Building Survey 2020 shows 78 tall buildings in the planning pipeline in Tower Hamlets with 18 completed in 2019. Both numbers substantially in excess of any other Borough.

It is clear that Tower Hamlets is the home of both the most tall buildings (as well as tallest) and the greatest number of buildings with fire safety issues

We welcome the government's Hackett review and will lobby for changes to building regulations – which include fire safety regulations – to be robust. The GLA is also producing policy on Fire Safety in the London Plan. We will ensure plans in Tower Hamlets comply with this.

This Council further notes:

That residents face huge uncertainty in two areas;

1. Living in buildings whose fire safety is suspect or where regulations are now different, who may now have 247 fire wardens and emergency evacuation procedures;
2. Living with huge financial uncertainty that could result in bankruptcy, inability to sell their properties, increased service charges or financially crippling bills;

That housing associations may also face financial pressures for similar reasons.

The draft Building Safety Bill which puts the financial onus on homeowners rather than those who built, approved, signed off or regulated those buildings.

That some buildings were approved by Tower Hamlets Council own building control team, although we note that the team were assessing in accordance with the regulations at the time.

That as yet except for national charities like Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and neighbour assisting neighbour there is no local help nor advice available. Residents are having to become experts on these issues but with no support nor assistance.

The funding available from central government to remediate both ACM and EWS issues is inadequate and could leave leaseholders bearing the brunt of costly remediation work.

That on the 13th November 2019 an amended motion 11.1 Motion regarding Restoring Fairness to the Leasehold System was adopted by Tower Hamlets Council and that the CMA issued its investigation report in February 2020.

This Council resolves:

- That we ~~need to compile~~ urge the Government to publish a database of every affected building of all types, so that we capture in detail the kinds of problems, types of buildings, height etc;
- That list needs to be published in a summarised and anonymised way so that we understand the scale of the issue in Tower Hamlets and across the country, how many residents live in unsafe buildings?;
- That we call on the Government to make access to the building remediation fund less complicated and time consuming;
- That where developers are submitting new planning applications but have unresolved issues in their older buildings which they have chosen to not help resolve that they justify why they should be allowed to build again, although we note that the applicants themselves are not a material consideration and that applications are assessed on their merits in accordance with relevant development plan policies;
- That we ask the Lead Members and officers to explore and report back on:
 - What advice is already available, and whether it would be beneficial to add to the advice already available through ~~That we establish~~ using s106 or New Homes Bonus LIF to funds a Help & Advice team for a time limited period (3 years tbc), whose role it is could be to advise residents and to keep them informed as well as ensure developers and managing agents are aware of their responsibilities;
 - ~~That LBTH provide~~ providing assistance with access to planning permission/building regs if required for Fire Remediation and also access to technical drawings for older buildings which are not on the LBTH portal for free if the purpose is to deal with fire safety issues;
 - That A piece of work to sit alongside the High Density Living Supplementary Planning Document ~~be expanded to~~ with a focus on the management issues caused by tall buildings as well as fire issues even if it can only include recommendations;
- That we ask government to expand the funding available to deal with these issues as it cannot be right for home owners to foot the bill for failures in regulation and oversight by professionals and government;
- That S106 is paid to deliver on specific issues so cannot be used for remediation, but where a building has fire safety issues ~~and where the s106 remains unspent that it be spent on resolving these issues~~, it would be unfair for residents to have to pay s106, which remains unspent and then again to fix their homes;
- ~~That the same is done for any buildings that gained New Homes Bonus for us.~~