Dear Colleague letter from Sajid Javid – 28 July 2017

Dear Colleague,

In my 20 July statement on the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, I promised to keep Members updated on any developments during the summer recess. This letter, which is being sent to all Members, is the first of those updates.

As I explained last week, following advice from the Independent Expert Advisory Panel, the Government commissioned six large-scale tests of combinations of three different types of aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding with either foam or mineral wool insulation, each with the required cavity barriers in place.

The first test was of a wall cladding system consisting of ACM with polyethylene filler and foam insulation.

The expert panel have advised that the test showed that this combination did not achieve the BR135 classification in accordance with the British Standard 8414 -1 test – which, in plain English, means that it does not comply with current Building Regulations guidance for use on high rise buildings over 18 metres tall.

We have identified 82 tall buildings that have this combination of materials in their wall cladding systems – 47 of which are Local Authority or Housing association owned or managed, with 35 other buildings also identified. The owners of all 82 have been informed and advised on what steps to take as a result, based on advice from the Independent Expert Advisory Panel, which has been provided to them and to other interested parties.

The detailed advice is also being shared publicly on Gov.UK. Briefly, it calls on building owners to ensure they have implemented the interim fire safety measures set out in our 22 June letter to local authorities, and to obtain and act on professional independent advice regarding what steps need to be taken to make their building safe.

While the immediate safety of existing tower block residents is our number one priority, we are also committed to making sure all homes will be as safe as they can be in future. To that end, I am today announcing a full-scale review of building regulations and fire safety, with a focus on tall residential buildings.

The review, which will be conducted independently of Government and will complement Sir Martin Moore-Bick’s public inquiry, will cover:

 the regulatory system around the design, construction and on-going management of buildings in relation to fire safety;

 related compliance and enforcement issues; and

 international regulation and experience in this area.

The full terms of reference will be published later in the summer, once the terms of reference for the public inquiry have been agreed.

The review will be led by Dame Judith Hackitt. She brings a wealth of experience to the role as a former chair of the Health and Safety Executive, a fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, a former president of the Institute of Chemical Engineers, and also as Chair of EEF, The Manufacturers’ Organisation. She is a respected, authoritative and, above all, independent voice in the engineering and manufacturing sector. She will provide the expert leadership the review requires, and I’m sure you’ll join me in offering her your full support.

Work will begin as soon as possible, with the aim of delivering an interim report to myself and the Home Secretary before the end of the year and a final report no later than the spring of 2018. This will allow the Government to take any required action as promptly as possible without compromising the integrity of the review.

Although building regulations and fire safety are the responsibility of devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, I would hope that any relevant insights are taken into account by authorities right across the UK.

The review will see to it that building regulations and fire safety are as effective as possible going forward. Meanwhile the programme of testing, both of cladding samples and full cladding systems, will continue; its results will be used to help tackle any immediate fire safety risks.

Since last month’s disaster, I know many of us have heard from constituents who are worried about fire safety. I hope our ongoing programme of action, which is designed to ensure that all our homes are as safe as they can be both now and in the future, will go some way to addressing those concerns.

The Government also wrote yesterday to all local authorities and housing associations to outline funding arrangements. The Government expects that building owners will fund measures designed to make a building fire safe, and will draw on their existing resources to do so.

However, where a relevant body has concerns about funding essential fire safety measures, we have said that they should approach the Government as soon as possible to discuss their position. We will work with them so current restrictions on the use of their financial resources do not prevent them from making essential fire safety upgrades to buildings.

As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch with my office if you would like to discuss this matter further. I will provide a further update on action being taken as soon as it is appropriate to do so.