

ANDY BURNHAM

**MAYOR OF
GREATER
MANCHESTER**

James Frith MP
House of Commons
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6th July, 2017

Dear James,

Thank you for your email raising the important issue of fire safety in high rise buildings across the city region and in particular Bury North.

Following the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in London and in direct response to the concerns of residents in similar buildings, I have set up a taskforce to look at safety issues in high rise properties across Greater Manchester, which is being led by Salford City Mayor, Paul Dennett.

Mayor Dennett will be supported by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) and has already met with many private and public sector landlords to help them ensure everyone living in a high rise building in Greater Manchester is safe and receives the right fire safety advice.

Specialist officers from GMFRS have already carried out visits to more than 180 high-rise properties in Greater Manchester to identify any immediate issues which give cause for concern and will carry out a major joint inspection, alongside housing providers, of any building where the cladding has failed the Building Research Establishment tests. Be reassured that landlords with any building where the cladding has failed the test have put in place significant measures to minimise the risk to residents in the event of a fire. These include evacuation plans and 24-hour security patrols in the buildings.

In answer to the specific questions you raise:

How many tower blocks across Greater Manchester have already had the cladding tested and how long before you are satisfied that all blocks have been examined?

In Greater Manchester we have approximately 470 high rise residential premises. DCLG have informed us of 61 premises that have either failed the Building Research Establishment (BRE) fire test or have Aluminium Composite Material cladding that needs a compliance inspection. We have inspected all 61 plus an additional 10 whereby local authority building control or residents have raised concerns. We are also proactively carrying out further compliance inspections across high-rise premises, sequenced in line with risk profile. We expect that we will be inspecting all our high rise residential premises for at least the next two months.

Have Building Regulations been applied across Greater Manchester in the same way or have you found any variation in the interpretation from one authority to another?

Unfortunately, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) cannot supply this information. GMFRS are not the enforcing authority with regard to Building Regulations. Within Greater Manchester there is an Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Building Control Group which represents the Local Authority Building Controls across Greater Manchester. However, the Building Control sector was opened up to wider competition and there are now private Approved Inspectors who can undertake the work.

How many tower blocks have got failed cladding in terms of its fire resistance?

We have been informed of 61 premises that have either failed the Building Research Establishment (BRE) fire test or have Aluminium Composite Material cladding that requires a compliance inspection.

How many tower blocks were not built with the fire breaks in place, as appears to have been the case in Grenfell thereby allowing the fire to travel up chimneys?

Unfortunately, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) cannot supply this information. As set out in the previous answer, GMFRS are not the enforcing authority with regard to Building Regulations.

How many tower blocks have used flammable materials, against regulations, above the 80-metre height restriction?

Within Building Regulations 18m is the height at which additional measures are required. The Building Regulations require that such systems, when installed on residential buildings over 18 metres high, should be of 'limited combustibility' and have a surface spread of flame classification of 0 (e.g. it shouldn't support the spread of flame). These requirements are set out in 'Approved Document B, Volume 2 – Buildings Other than Dwelling houses' British Standard 8414 allows for the fire performance testing of external cladding systems. As stated above, the requirement of the building regulations is that such systems when fitted to residential buildings over 18 high, should be of limited combustibility. We do not know how many blocks have what type of external facades as GMFRS are not the enforcing authority with regard to the Building Regulations.

What steps are being taken to ensure that we have fire platforms in Greater Manchester which can reach higher floors than those available in London?

Prior to the fire at Grenfell Tower, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) have reviewed its existing aerial appliance provision. Currently, GMFRS operate six aerial appliances known as Hydraulic Platforms which have a maximum working height of 27.8 metres. Following an extensive review and procurement exercise, an order has been placed for two new aerial appliances within this financial year with a further two to be delivered in the following years. The new aerial appliances are known as Turntable ladders (TL), the initial two TLs have a maximum working height of 32m and 42m. Although the maximum working height has increased, the 42m TL would be able, in ideal conditions, to reach the 14th floor of a high rise premises. Within the UK the 42m aerial appliances are the largest in service. Globally there are some countries that have aerial appliances that are bigger mainly in an industrial setting, but it is unlikely they would be able to reach the 23rd storey and manoeuvrability in an urban environment is difficult due to the sheer size of the vehicles.

What steps are being taken to ensure that all firefighters use the training facility in Bury which has a tower block scenario because clearly, the numbers involved in the fire in London required team from across the capital and outside who may not have worked in this type of fire.?

The service training facility at Bury is utilised by all operational firefighters across Greater Manchester, the mandatory training is called the operational licence training. GMFRS are one of the first services across the UK to launch an operational licence training. The operational licence allows the service to design training based on significant local and national events. It has been recognised for many years that high-rise firefighting is complex and arduous, that is why a high rise facility was a key design requirement. In addition to the training that is undertaken at the facility in Bury, local training is undertaken as part of a maintenance of skills programme that is overseen by the Station and Watch Managers at every station across Greater Manchester. In addition to the training, GMFRS have a system known as the Operational Information System, where local firefighters capture risk information about certain premises including high rise premises that allow fire fighters to utilise information en-route or at an operational incident involving high rise premises. Following the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower local crews have been reviewing the information. Finally, even though the number of high rise premises is more prevalent in Manchester and Salford, all other local authority areas across Greater Manchester have some high rise premises which local operational crews attend incidents at.

As you know, Deputy Mayor Bev Hughes attended the APPG for GM MPs on 4th July 2017 and gave a full briefing on the position at that time and took questions. Mayor Dennett, Chair of the Taskforce, has offered further written briefings as the situation develops.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andy". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'A'.

Andy Burnham
Mayor of Manchester

cc Salford City Mayor, Paul Dennett

