



From the Leader of the Council

Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
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Leader's Room,
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22nd November 2017

Dear Chancellor,

I am writing to you following today's budget and your very welcome call to all local authorities and housing associations to identify and carry out safety improvements in high-rise buildings as quickly as possible.

This is exactly what Wandsworth Council has been doing. The safety of all our tenants and leaseholders is of paramount importance and we have been getting on with the job, moving quickly to identify and set aside £30 million of council resources to pay for vital safety measures such as replacing cladding and installing sprinklers. We have also set up fire watch patrols while these improvements are carried out, adding an extra layer of safety for our tenants.

Wandsworth has 99 blocks of 10 storeys or more, more than any borough in London, and I am proud that we are leading the way in ensuring that our residents get the highest levels of protection, especially in the wake of the terrible tragedy and loss of life that occurred at Grenfell Tower.

We want to be absolutely certain that every one of our residents who live in a council block is safe and we will do everything to now make sure that nothing like Grenfell ever happens here.

This funding we have provided covers the costs of protecting all tenanted properties but not leasehold properties. Wandsworth, having pioneered right to buy, has over 1358 leaseholders who would have to contribute towards these safety measures and not all will be able to afford the cost.

You have said that you will not allow financial constraints to get in the way of any essential fire safety work, and we would like to request Government support to cover the costs for leaseholders and help ease the financial burden for them.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Ravi Govindia CBE
Leader, Wandsworth Borough Council

number one for
service and value

*looking forward to details
on the housing package
which was a great
stroke - well done*



**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

Cllr Ravi Govindia, Leader
London Borough of Wandsworth
Leader's Room, Town Hall
Wandsworth High Street
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SW18 2PU

Dominic Raab MP
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Our Ref:3573207

23 January 2018

Dear Mr Govindia,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November to the Chancellor, and further correspondence to my department. I am replying as Minister for Housing, to address your questions regarding fire safety.

May I first commend you on the proactive approach you are taking as a council to provide reassurance to your tenants. We recognise that local authorities are working hard to ensure that their buildings are safe and I appreciate your getting in touch with details of your position.

I understand you are in the process of setting up a meeting with my officials to discuss your wider housing issues. It would be useful to have more detail on the specific issue of fire safety, and my officials would be happy to discuss this.

As you are aware, the starting assumption is that local authorities, as the landlord, will fund the costs of necessary fire safety work. Local authorities should draw on existing resources do so. However, we will consider the removal of financial restrictions where these stand in the way of essential work being done. This would not include general improvements or enhancements to buildings which go beyond this. Support could include either extending the ability to borrow within the Housing Revenue Account, or possibly a one-off agreement to use general fund money. If you would like to explore this in more detail, please provide a response to the attached list of questions. Once we have received the information, my officials will be in contact to discuss it further. Please send your reply to:
localauthorityhousing@communities.gsi.gov.uk

In regard to your point on leaseholders, it is for the responsible person to take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of residents. In the social sector, local authorities and housing associations with which the department has been in discussion have indicated that they are choosing not to pass on the costs of essential fire safety works to leaseholders. The Secretary of State made it clear in Parliament on 4 December 2017 that he considers this is the right approach.

In the private sector, in some cases, costs will fall naturally to the freeholder, landlord, or those acting on their behalf. Where they do not, the Secretary of State has urged those with

responsibility to follow the lead from the social sector and private companies already doing the right thing, and not attempting to pass on costs to leaseholders. Leaseholders can already access specialist advice to understand their rights through the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE). The Secretary of State announced on 4 December 2017 that the Government is allocating additional funding to LEASE, to provide dedicated support for those leaseholders affected. More information on LEASE, including how to contact them for advice, is available here: <https://www.lease-advice.org/>.

You surely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Raab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DOMINIC RAAB MP