



# Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

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## **Response to Grenfell Tower – June 2017**

Thank you for contacting me about the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower.

It is impossible to comprehend what everybody affected by the fire has been going through. The response of people who have provided help, compassion and support has once again shown the fantastic spirit of London and the best of Britain. I also pay tribute to the emergency services, who put their lives in danger to save others.

I completely understand the shock, concern, anger and frustration that exists as a result of this. The Prime Minister has ordered a full, judge-led public inquiry, which will give people the answers they deserve.

The Grenfell Tower Recovery task force was set up in the aftermath of the tragedy to ensure a coordinated response. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes representation from a number of government departments. The government is working with the local authority to ensure that people who lost their homes in the disaster are rehoused in the local area at the earliest opportunity (within 3 weeks at the latest). The government is also working with local authorities, housing associations, fire and rescue services, and fire safety experts to ensure that all similar buildings are checked and that residents are assured of this.

A new £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund has also been made immediately available to help those who had to flee their homes. Every household whose home has been destroyed will receive a guaranteed £5,500 minimum down payment from the fund. This money could be used to cover loss of possessions, funerals and emergency supplies. I understand that the fund will be kept under review and will increase if necessary.

I am assured that the Government is checking quickly with local authorities to ensure that all high-rise buildings in their areas have complied with recent fire orders and is conducting a fire safety review of all building similar to Grenfell Tower. Further, the Government is making available a dedicated testing facility for landlords who are concerned about the cladding of their buildings.

At this stage it would be wrong to speculate on the causes of this fire. The coroner's report on the Lakanal House fire, which was published in 2013, made a number of recommendations which the Government have acted upon. Updated guidance on fighting fires in high-rise buildings was published in February 2014. The Government is planning to consult on simplifying relevant guidance shortly.

Police and fire investigation are already underway to establish what happened - and I know that the Government will take action on findings as they emerge. We need to establish all the facts to make sure nothing like this happens again.

Regarding the amendment that was proposed to the Housing and Planning Bill, the amendment would also not have provided any protection not already in existence. Under the Housing Act 2004, for example, councils have extremely strong and effective powers to deal with poor quality and unsafe accommodation. While it is too early to speculate on what caused the fire or how it spread, if it was down to faulty upgrades then that is down to a failure to meet existing standards - not a lack of standards.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig Whittaker MP