

Julie James MS,
Minister for Climate Change,
Welsh Government

24 March 2023

Dear Julie

Building safety

We write with regard to the ongoing building safety crisis. In our last letter to you, dated 25 November 2022, we referred to concerns raised by the Welsh Cladiators group about the pace and nature of the action the Welsh Government is taking to rectify the situation for leaseholders of affected buildings. Thank you for your response of 15 December 2022.

At our meeting on 1 March, we took evidence from the Welsh Cladiators group and from a panel of witnesses representing disabled leaseholders affected by the crisis. Their evidence demonstrated the understandable frustration felt by leaseholders at the lack of progress and action, and we found the evidence from both panels concerning.

We heard from the Welsh Cladiators group that investigations carried out on affected buildings have uncovered issues that go beyond fire safety alone, and that the situation is complex and ever changing. It's clear to us that several of the building defect issues pre-date the Grenfell tragedy. This raises questions around general building standards and the apparent lack of regulations for defects to be rectified.

We also heard from the group about the results of a recent freedom of information request it made in relation to the Welsh building fund. The group told us that the request showed that, as of the end of February this year, only £75,000 of the £375 million fund, had been committed to cover survey fees. We would be grateful for further information as to how this fund will be spent to resolve the ongoing building safety issues.



The Welsh Cladiators group also told us of their concerns around the surveys being carried out, in particular, that the reports can't be released until all of the surveys have been completed. We heard that group members have paid for detailed surveys, the results of which have been given to the Welsh Government. The members were concerned that these surveys were tailored more appropriately to their circumstances compared with the surveys carried out by Welsh Government. We understand that there have been delays in completing all surveys, and we understand the frustration of the group who are aware that the survey for their buildings have been completed but are unable to see the results. We would be grateful if you could provide a timescale for when the reports will be released for leaseholders to see.

We heard from CladDag members that remediation work can have a disproportionate impact on disabled leaseholders, both in terms of the remediation costs and the disruption. We heard that disabled leaseholders are disproportionately more likely to feel trapped in unsafe buildings, which lack suitable adaptations. For example, we heard of cases where disabled leaseholders had waited several years for available accessible properties to move into, to enable remediation works to be done, and in these instances the properties fell through, and so the leaseholders were not able to move in time for the works to be done.

We also heard that in an emergency situation, the support required by disabled leaseholders is not always considered by the relevant services, such as fire and rescue. We believe this should be addressed as a matter of urgency and that coordination between services to ensure support for disabled leaseholders must take place. We were disappointed to hear of a lack of advocacy for disabled leaseholders, and concerned by the inequality and additional barriers faced by disabled leaseholders as a result of the building safety crisis. We are concerned about the human cost of the ongoing situation while all leaseholders wait for solutions and ask what can be done to address the matters urgently.

The witnesses we heard from on 1 March all agreed that legislation is required to protect leaseholders and that voluntary arrangements have not worked effectively. We have previously emphasised the importance of the Welsh Government bringing forward legislation in this area as a matter of urgency and we ask for an update on the progress of a Welsh Building Safety Bill, which you have mentioned will be introduced before the end of the Sixth Senedd.

As mentioned, it is clear to us that there are issues surrounding building standards and regulations that go beyond building safety alone, and we will revisit these issues during our current inquiry on the right to adequate housing.

We will be grateful for a prompt response to this letter.

Cc. to the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely

John

John Griffiths MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament