

Rt. Hon. Michael Gove M.P.
Secretary of State
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
By email

8th March 2024

Dear Mr. Gove,

Funding for Barnet Council to support the remediation of timber framed buildings and dangerous cladding and ensure private freeholders do not bear costs

I am writing on behalf of residents in Burnt Oak to ask that the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) makes funds available to cover the full cost of replacing dangerous cladding and undertaking remediation to improve the fire safety of almost 600 timber framed and timber/UPVC clad houses in Barnet, including all the privately owned residences affected. Private owners, who bought the properties in good faith, should not be forced to pay for the remediation.

As you will be aware, a house fire occurred last summer in West Finchley which spread across four properties. The fire spread due to the way the properties had been constructed and clad. The incident raised significant concerns about whether other properties in Barnet might also be vulnerable to similar fire risks.

Following an investigation, the Barnet Group has identified 586 homes of similar timber frame construction or clad in timber or UPVC, built between the 1930's and 1960's, that will require remediation to mitigate the fire safety risks they face.

153 of the homes identified through this process are council owned. The Council has put aside funding to cover their remediation.

However, the majority-426-are privately owned, having been bought by their tenants through the Right-to-Buy scheme. Many of the affected properties are in Burnt Oak.

Private owners are facing potentially enormous bills for the remediation. Estimates are that they could be as high as £23,000 per property. You can imagine the impact of a bill of this size will have on families that are already struggling to make ends meet.

The Council-which inherited this problem and has a legal duty to act-is working hard to offer alternatives, but unfortunately does not have the funds to finance the remediation of the privately-owned homes. I understand that Barnet Council has written to the Department asking for support to fund the remediation work so that the costs do not fall on the home owners. I wanted to write to support a request that additional financial support is granted to the Council to ensure that the works are fully funded and that no home-owners are forced to pay.

The private owners-freeholders and leaseholders-who bought the properties in good faith under the Right-to-Buy should not have to pay the costs of fixing the issues with the timber frames and dangerous cladding that ore-date their purchases of the properties. They should not be made to pay for others' mistakes.

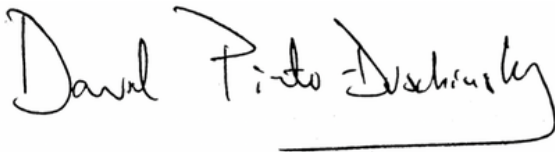
Over the last few years, central government has set up a number of schemes that have established the principle that government should pay for the remediation of unsafe cladding where the freeholder cannot or where it would clearly be unfair. While those schemes have focused on high and medium-rise buildings, given the legacy nature of the issue, I believe it is appropriate that central government provides the funds to cover the costs of all remediation of all properties. The total amount-including the remediation of the council properties and all private properties-will come to around £13 million. This level of support would mean that no home owners would be out of pocket.

I hope very much that you will be able to support the request for additional funds to be made available to the Council to support the remediation of all properties. It will make a huge difference to hundreds of families in Burnt Oak and across Barnet.

I would ask that DLUHC moves quickly on this issue. The anxiety around the potential bill is hitting local families hard. They should not have to live under the shadow of this problem.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



David Pinto-Duschinsky