

**The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP**

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22 March 2018

(Sent via email)

Dear Secretary of State,

**London Assembly Planning Committee report – *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes***

It is impossible to begin this letter without first paying respect to the 71 victims of the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 and offering my deepest sympathies to their families and loved ones.

On 22 June 2017 you stated that 'this tragedy should weigh on the consciousness of every person tasked with making a decision so this can never happen again'.<sup>1</sup> I applaud the Government for its quick action in setting up the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. However, when the Independent Review releases its final report in Spring 2018, the Government will need to make some crucial decisions. One of those decisions should be to take the next step in fire safety to more actively support the use of fire sprinklers in residential buildings.

Attached to this letter is a copy of our report, *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes*. The report is the result of a review I led on behalf of the London Assembly Planning Committee into the effectiveness and economic viability of requiring automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS) in London's buildings. The review included extensive evidence gathering over six months, including two roundtables with invited experts, a call for evidence, stakeholder meetings and four site visits to see AFSS installations.

Our report looks at the benefits AFSS offer as an additional layer of fire safety in residential buildings. AFSS, which include sprinklers, prevent fire from spreading and allow firefighters to more easily extinguish it. They also reduce the water damage from putting out a fire with a powerful fire hose. AFSS can also allow for more innovative and flexible building design and represent a small additional cost to the overall development costs, with average installation of between £1,000 to £2,000. However, although AFSS represent the next step in fire safety, they are not mandatory in residential buildings below 30 metres high in England.

In our report we recommend that the Government, Mayor and the fire and AFSS industries work together to produce a road map towards requiring AFSS in every new residential building in England. The road map should include clear milestones for bringing in changes to the Building Regulations, based on an assessment of risk for different types of residential development, the capacity of the market and the installation skills in the labour force.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/621485/Dear\\_Colleague\\_-\\_Grenfell.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/621485/Dear_Colleague_-_Grenfell.pdf)

A very important first step will be to require AFSS in all new residential buildings over 18 metres – 6 floors – high in England.

As part of this road map, our report recommends that the Government should require AFSS to be fitted during refurbishment work where ‘consequential improvements’ are made on residential buildings with floor areas over 1,000 square metres. AFSS should also be fitted in all new and existing care homes and sheltered housing to protect the most vulnerable people from fire.

Some buildings will, however, require urgent action to ensure they are better protected from fire. We recommend that the Mayor develops a new £50 million ‘London Sprinkler Retrofitting Fund’. The primary goal of this fund should be to support housing providers to fit AFSS to where residents are most vulnerable to fire and there are extra costs and challenges to retrofitting sprinklers. This builds on the risk-based approach used by the London Fire Brigade, such as installing AFSS in high risk properties through its £1.5 million Community Infrastructure Fund. Match funding should be provided by the bidder to allow more buildings to be retrofitted with the same funding, an approach used successfully by the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service’s Think Sprinkler Strategy. I urge you to consider contributing to this fund along with the Mayor.

The Government could also consider allowing local authorities to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board or relax the rules around borrowing through the Housing Revenue Account specifically for retrofitting AFSS.

I hope that you will agree that making AFSS mandatory is necessary over time to ensure that a devastating fire like the one at Grenfell Tower never happens again. By supporting our recommendations, you will be making a decision that will mean people across London and the rest of England are safer from fire in their homes.

I would be grateful to receive a response to the report’s recommendations by 22 May 2018. Please send a copy of your reply to Reece Harris, Assistant Scrutiny Manager at [reece.harris@london.gov.uk](mailto:reece.harris@london.gov.uk).

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,



**Navin Shan AM**

Rapporteur for the London Assembly Planning Committee