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(Sent via email)

Dear Sadiq,

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

The devastating fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 is a strong reminder of the urgent need to make London's homes safer from fire. We cannot begin to discuss fire safety without paying our deepest respects to the 71 people who lost their lives in that fire. I am sure you agree that we must act now to ensure that such a fire never happens again.

The time is right to take the next step in fire safety and ensure AFSS are fitted in Londoner's homes. I am pleased that you have chosen to make the urgent case for higher standards of fire safety in London's buildings by introducing new requirements in the planning process through Policy D11 Fire Safety. However, I believe that you should go further and more boldly make the case for AFSS as the next step in fire safety in London.

Attached to this letter is a copy of the 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 London's homes. 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 tiny cost, with average installation costs 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 legislative phased 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.

I welcome your support for ensuring that people in all new developments, including disabled people, are protected from fire. A very important first step will be to require AFSS in all

residential buildings over 18 metres – 6 floors – high in England. We are also calling for AFSS to be required in care homes and sheltered housing to protect the most vulnerable in society. You should encourage this by including a strong presumption in Policy D11 of the London Plan that buildings over 18 metres – 6 storeys – high, care homes and sheltered housing will be fitted with AFSS.

You have said that it is “completely unacceptable that just two per cent of tower blocks are fitted with sprinklers”.¹ I agree with you and many buildings will require urgent action now to ensure they are better protected from fire. As part of the risk-based road map, our report recommends that the Government should require AFSS to be fitted in existing tall buildings, care homes and sheltered housing during refurbishment work.

However, requiring AFSS to be retrofitted in every existing building is not immediately feasible. In those buildings over 30 metres high alone, this could cost up to £500 million. There is no public funding available to meet these costs and freeholders, leaseholders and tenants cannot be expected to pay the full amount.

We recommend that you develop a new £50 million ‘London Sprinkler Retrofitting Fund’. The primary goal of this fund should be to support housing providers to fit AFSS where residents are most vulnerable to fire and where there are significant extra costs and challenges. 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. A £50 million fund would for example be sufficient to retrofit around 200 blocks, based on costs of around £400,000 per block. The Fund would be provided by you, with support from central government. I hope that you will agree that this funding is necessary to protect London’s most vulnerable people from fire.

We share a conviction that urgent and robust change is necessary to protect Londoners from fire. I hope you can join us in calling on the Government to implement our road map towards making AFSS mandatory in England, to ensure that a devastating fire like the one at Grenfell Tower never happens again.

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.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,



Navin Shan AM

Rapporteur for the London Assembly Planning Committee

CC: Fiona Twycross, Chair of LFEP

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-boosts-fire-safety-in-new-draft-london-plan>