

Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning
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By Email:

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[Name Redacted]

Thank you for your communication of 17 December 2019 following the recent Local Government and Communities Committee session of Building Regulations and Fire Safety in Scotland held on 20 Nov 2019.

Scottish Ministers take the safety of residents and occupants in Scotland's buildings seriously, with a Ministerial Working Group (MWG) being set up in the days immediately following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower in June 2017. One of the work streams to come out of the MWG was the establishment a review panel, which was charged with reviewing the standards and guidance for high rise domestic and residential buildings in light of emerging findings from the Grenfell Tower fire.

The membership of the main review panel was drawn from experts from the United Kingdom working in academia, industry, fire engineering, Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, Local Authority Building Standards Scotland and UK Government and devolved administrations. In addition, there was also a "sub-committee" consisting of international experts in the field of building standards, in particular from a fire design perspective.

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The Building Standards (fire safety) expert review panel did not support an outright ban on combustible cladding and concluded that the wording of the mandatory standard inhibiting fire spread on external walls was robust but the supporting guidance could be strengthened. [Name Redacted] also indicated at the Local Government and Communities Committee session that the matter was more complex and a ban would not be practicable.

As was set out by the witnesses at the Local Government and Communities Committee meeting on the 20 November, while cladding is clearly important, there is more to fire risk of a building than that one element. This is why on 1 October 2019, the Scottish Government introduced new regulations which will make Scotland's high-rise buildings even safer. The new guidance embraces a range of measures which include; a) lowering the height at which combustible cladding can be used from 18 metres to 11 metres to align with fire-fighting from the ground b) tighter controls over the combustibility of cladding systems on hospitals, residential care buildings, entertainment and assembly buildings regardless of building height; c) introducing evacuation sound alerts, floor and dwelling indicator signs and two escape stairs in all new high rise domestic buildings.

We have also made a commitment to introduce a mandatory requirement to install sprinkler systems in all new build flats, certain multi-occupancy dwellings and social housing from 2021.

As you are aware the BS 8414 test is one of the most robust fire tests in the world and the type of combustible cladding material used on the Grenfell Tower failed this British Standard test.

During the summer last year, the Scottish Government consulted on a range of measures aimed at strengthening the safety of our buildings. In our consultation, a range of expert bodies were supportive of BS 8414, including the National Fire Chiefs Council, Local Authority Building Standards Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Scottish Property Federation, Homes for Scotland and the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland.

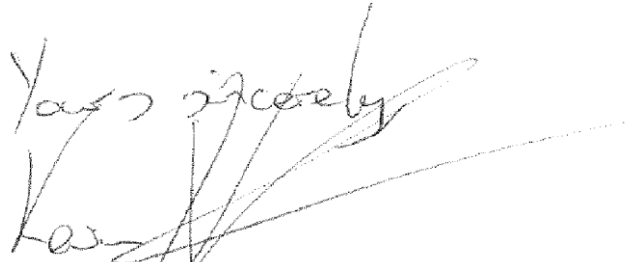
This year the British Standards Institution sought public comments on the BS 8414 test which are now being considered by the relevant British Standards Committee, which is both expert and independent of government. We will follow the findings of the British Standards Institution Committee and take those into consideration in setting our regulations.

The safety of building occupants is central to the building standards system in Scotland and whilst we are confident in our building standards, we are not complacent, and this is why we established reviews, sought expert advice and have implemented the recommendations made. We will of course review any findings or recommendations made following phase two of the Grenfell Inquiry.

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I note that within your letter you have offered to assist with this matter. May I therefore suggest that you arrange to meet my officials who will be happy to discuss the issues you have raised.

I look forward to receiving an update from officials in due course. Please contact Stephen Garvin Head of Building Standards in the first instance Tel: 0131 244 6533 Email: Stephen.Garvin@gov.scot.



KEVIN STEWART

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