

# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Response to Grenfell Tower: Further Update** |
| **DATE** | **18 July 2017** |
| **BY** | **Carl Sargent AM, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children** |

As part on my ongoing commitment to share information on this still rapidly developing situation, I am now able to provide a further update on actions being taken following the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

There has been concern and debate around the initial screening tests being undertaken by BRE on behalf of the UK Government. These remain in place, but the UK Expert Group has confirmed that a series of ‘full-system’ tests are also to be conducted, starting shortly. These will test how different combinations of cladding and insulation material react in a large scale simulation of a fire situation on a 9 metre high test rig. Once test results are analysed, we expect the UK Expert Panel’s further consideration and this, in turn, will inform next steps for buildings where ACM cladding has been identified.

Pending further advice from the UK Expert Panel, it is right that landlords continue to work closely with their local fire and rescue services to ensure that all appropriate precautionary measures are in place and take a building-by-building view on the overall fire risk.

We now have a clear picture of the position in the social housing sector and are broadening our focus to take stock of the situation more generally. Currently, we are working with our partners better to understand the scope and scale in other buildings that have, or may have, ACM cladding and which may be of concern. That work includes buildings in education settings, in the NHS Wales estate and in private ownership.

In addition to the high-rise tower blocks in the social housing sector, we are continuing to work with local authorities to identify privately-owned high-rise residential buildings across Wales. My officials are also are using Land Registry records to establish up-to-date particulars relating to ownership of these buildings and verifying that information with the Welsh Government’s Information Services. We intend to write to each building owner by the end of this week, giving guidance on identification and initial screening of any ACM materials on these buildings. Our expectation of private owners is the same as for social landlords: that they undertake initial screening of ACM with the BRE; that they take precautionary measures where ACM is identified, in line with DCLG guidance; and, of course, that they have up-to-date and comprehensive fire safety risk assessments.

Across the wider public estate we are beginning to get a much clearer picture of the level of ACM use, which is relatively low here in Wales. To date, no ACM has been identified by Health Boards in NHS buildings, based on the criteria set out on 3 July. This information is being double-checked and I expect final confirmation later this week.

The Welsh Government has written to local authorities, diocesan authorities, Further Education Institutions and HEFCW in respect of the presence of ACM materials on buildings that meet the trigger heights in guidance issued by the UK Government. No school or FE institutions buildings meeting the criteria have been identified to date. In relation to the HE sector, we continue to work with HEFCW and universities to identify buildings with ACM cladding that meet the trigger heights and, therefore, require sample testing. We are also working closely with HEFCW and local authorities to ensure we identify high-rise private-sector student accommodation that may require further action. At present, three universities have identified low-rise university-owned buildings with ACM and are considering, or have taken, precautionary measures, including sample testing, or have received independent (non-BRE) confirmation that the insulation is of appropriate fire retardant quality.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with landlords and building managers and ensure guidance is disseminated as soon as appropriate. I would also remind them that the UK Expert Panel has been clear that removal and/or replacement of ACM cladding must be undertaken only after the most careful consideration.

Finally, I welcome the establishment of the Fire Safety Advisory Group and will look forward to receiving its initial comments and recommendations.