



Steve Wright General Secretary
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE
fbu.org.uk | @fbunational
020 8541 1765 | office@fbu.org.uk

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Circular: 2025HOC0090SW

Date: 27th February 2025

To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister,

Government Response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report

On 26 February, the Westminster government published its response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 report. Deputy prime minister Angela Rayner gave a statement in parliament and MPs held a discussion on the issues.

The FBU's immediate response reiterated our condolences to the bereaved, survivors and residents of the Grenfell Tower fire. Firefighters and emergency control staff who responded to the Grenfell Tower fire showed tremendous dedication and bravery in incredibly difficult circumstances. The FBU continues to provide support for our members.

Public inquiry

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry published its Phase 2 report on 4 September 2024. This was their final report. The Inquiry formally closed on 10 February 2025. The report examined the underlying causes of the disaster and gave prominence to central government failures, especially decades of deregulation. The Inquiry made 58 recommendations, of which 37 were directed at the Westminster government and 21 at other bodies and institutions.

Government response

On 26 February 2025, the Westminster government said it had accepted the Inquiry's findings and was committed to delivering a strong response to all recommendations. The Westminster government accepted 28 of the 37 recommendations "in full" and the remaining nine "in principle".

The FBU believes this is the right way to proceed. Some recommendations require consultation and changes to legislation. In some cases, central government needs to go much further than the Inquiry's recommendations. To transform building safety and fire safety systems requires careful deliberation and the involvement of the workforce. Our members have a great deal of expertise, their voices must be heard.

The Westminster government accepted in principle the recommendation to create a single construction regulator. However it has not resolved what will happen to private bodies such as the BRE and BBA, which test and certificate products. They were criticised by the Inquiry for prioritising commercial interests above safety. The FBU wants public bodies to test and certificate products, with democratic oversight. The Westminster government has published a green paper on construction products.

The Westminster government accepted in principle the recommendation to establish a College of Fire and Rescue. It will consult on proposals from summer 2025. The FBU will scrutinise those proposals and contribute to the consultation process. The union opposed the privatisation of the Fire Service College in 2012, which followed years of underfunding. Any new college must be a public body, not a private company. Firefighters and emergency control staff must be central to any new training, research and national standards.

The Westminster government will establish a panel to examine building control and its relationship to national authorities. The Inquiry report was critical of the part-privatisation of building control in 1985. The FBU opposed privatisation at the time and ever since. Private “building control approvers” still operate, while local authority building control has been underfunded and run down. The FBU demands that local authority building control is strengthened and close collaboration with local fire inspectors is established.

Westminster debate

On 26 February, the Westminster parliament discussed the inquiry report and the government’s response. Angela Rayner rightly pointed to systemic failures over many decades that led to the Grenfell Tower fire. Although some changes have been introduced since 2017, much more remains to be done. A number of MPs raised important points in the debate.

Florence Eshalomi (Labour, Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) raised the issue of residential personal emergency evacuation plans – PEEPs – which were recommended in the public inquiry’s Phase 1 report.

Joe Powell (Labour, Kensington and Bayswater), whose constituency includes Grenfell Tower, rightly praised the community and asked about accountability for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the local council.

Ruth Cadbury (Labour, Brentford and Isleworth) challenged the role of Tri Fire Ltd and other fire engineers, who have left residents in peril.

Jacob Collier (Labour, Burton and Uttoxeter) asked about the roll out of national standards across the fire and rescue sector and progress on establishing a national college of fire and rescue.

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour, City of Durham) made a really important intervention. She said:

“The report from the Grenfell Tower inquiry is utterly scathing about the role of central Government and their obsession with deregulation. The drive to scrap so-called red tape was a key failing, which led to such a terrible incident and the avoidable loss of life. Will the deputy prime minister confirm to the House that that approach has been ditched in relation to policies concerning fire safety, building safety and the construction sector?”

Chris Vince (Labour, Harlow) paid tribute to firefighters and other emergency services that responded on the night of the fire. Angela Rayner said in response: “We owe them a debt of gratitude, and we also owe them the ongoing support that the government continue to provide.”

Wider issues

The debate on Grenfell raised a number of wider issues, which FBU members will want to consider.

The cladding and building safety crisis continues, to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of residents. It also represents an ongoing risk to firefighters attending incidents and conducting fire safety inspection. This underlines the case for sustained funding the fire and rescue service and the need for more firefighters, control staff and fire inspectors.

The safe evacuation of high rise residential buildings remains to be resolved. Guidance issued by the last Westminster government was inadequate. Disability and residents campaigns are not convinced that PEEPs will be delivered. The role of the Building Safety Regulator needs to be clarified.

The role of the NFCC is also mentioned in the Inquiry report and in the government's response. FBU members will recall that the NFCC was at the helm at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire. The NFCC did not participate in the inquiry and has largely avoided criticism. Yet the NFCC and its predecessor CFA supported privatisation and austerity imposed by Conservative governments, as well as light touch enforcement and other attacks on the fire and rescue service.

In the government's response to recommendations 35, 36, 37, 38, 39 and 41, it states:

"The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) accepts this recommendation on behalf of all fire and rescue services..."

"The NFCC will produce a delivery plan by the end of April 2025 to set out what actions it will take as a result."

The FBU will seek an urgent meeting with the NFCC to ensure our members are involved in every change within the fire and rescue service.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Wright', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steve Wright
General Secretary