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Andrew Dismore AM

Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee



Murad Qureshi AM

Chair of the Housing Committee

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

Dear Sadiq

5 October 2020

External Wall Fire Review (EWS1 form)

We are writing about the problems facing Londoners living in leasehold homes who are finding themselves unable to move or remortgage due to the unavailability of an external wall fire review form (EWS1), without which mortgage lenders won't release financing. The responsibility for getting these reviews done sits with freeholders.

A recent (12 June) report by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee¹ looked at this issue and condemned the mortgage industry's cladding form as slow and expensive. The Committee recommended that the Government intercede with mortgage lenders. Although the Housing Minister, Christopher Pincher, said that mortgage lenders were reviewing the process there has been no progress made to date.

Both Murad and I have been receiving correspondence from Londoners telling of their distress and financial loss caused by their inability to move because of the impasse over these reviews, which they cannot commission themselves. An example of a Londoner who is stuck in this dire situation is Sam from East London. Sam bought a shared ownership flat in March 2017. Sam has described his experience with the housing association as "very frustrating", who seemingly lack any sense of urgency to ensure that the EWS1 is put in place for their building. In the latest correspondence from the housing association to another resident in March 2020, they have stated that their programme may take "ten years to deliver". This means that Sam and other people in his building cannot move property until the EWS1 forms are issued which could take up to 10 years.

Another Londoner who recently got in touch with the London Assembly is Mark. Mark lives in North London with his wife and 2 children in a one bed flat. His block has timber cladding and needs

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/85/cladding-progress-on-remediation/publications/>

remedial work. Mark owns 55% of the property but has been told by his landlord that he must pay 100% of the costs of the remedial work. The building in which Mark lives in is under 18 metres so it does not qualify for funding under the Government's £1bn package to deal with this issue. Mark and his wife have lost 3 potential buyers over the last year due to the EWS1 form situation and have subsequently had to abandon their search for their family home. This is having devastating effects on the whole family's mental well-being.

Sam and Mark are just two people who live in a building affected by cladding. It has been estimated that 2,000 high-rise buildings across London ² are yet to have remediation undertaken post-Grenfell so cannot get an EWS1 form. It has also been identified that mortgage lenders and building societies are now requiring EWS1 forms for properties below 18m height directly impacting on many others. Londoners, from families to first-time buyers, have invested in property across the capital and now find themselves in this extremely difficult situation with nowhere to turn to for support.

The Public Accounts Committee published a report on progress on remediating dangerous cladding on 16 September. The Committee noted that besides the Government's £1bn investment, which is estimated to cover a third of the total cost to remove dangerous cladding from buildings across the UK, "the Government has no plans to support residents or social landlords to meet the costs of replacing dangerous cladding in buildings below 18 metres." The Committee also acknowledged the financial burden and 'nil' valuations that leaseholders face because of EWS1 forms not being available and the shortage of qualified fire engineers to complete these.'

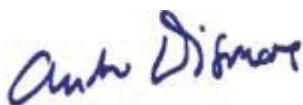
In what has already been an extremely difficult year for our city, we cannot sit by and watch thousands of Londoners be affected by this issue, which leaves them stranded and unable to plan for the future. They are stuck in limbo. Through no fault of their own, these Londoners are struggling financially and mentally and there's no one helping them find solutions to this vast and complicated problem. Safety must come first and while the EWS1 forms bring safety to people buying houses across the UK, we cannot allow EWS1 forms to protect some but trap others in potentially unsafe buildings with no support. In addition to your letter to the Government on this issue which detailed five key steps to tackle the EWS1 form issue, as Mayor of London there is action you can take to help those Londoners who need urgent support.

We ask that you:

1. Raise this issue urgently with the housing sector in London by setting up a housing task force with a view to agreeing a common approach for obtaining EWS1 forms;
2. Urgently look into how you can use your Adult Education Budget to help combat the shortage of specialist skills needed to tackle the unsafe cladding issue which is impacting thousands of Londoners across our city.

Please can you respond to this letter by 16th October 2020 and copy in Diane Richards (diane.richards@london.gov.uk) to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Dismore AM

² Housing, Communities and local Government Committee report Cladding: progress on remediation, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/1438/documents/13153/default/> , 12 June 2020

Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Murad Qureshi". A single black line is drawn underneath the signature.

Murad Qureshi AM

Chair of the Housing Committee