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22 March 2018

(Sent via email)

Dear Commissioner,

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

I cannot begin a letter on fire safety in London without expressing my deepest respect to the 71 victims of the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 and their loved ones. That terrible fire, fought with bravery and tenacity by you and your fellow officers at the London Fire Brigade, must never happen again.

Those communities affected by the fire are relying on the authorities to act. It is encouraging that the London Fire Brigade has been resolute in its calls for the greater provision of sprinklers in London's homes, care homes, sheltered housing and schools. You told me that we "only have to look at the recent past to understand how important it is for us to have sprinklers in buildings above 18 metres".¹ I agree with you that the time is right to take the next step in fire safety and ensure sprinklers are fitted in London's homes.

As you know over the past six months I have been working on behalf of the London Assembly Planning Committee on a review into the effectiveness and economic viability of requiring automatic fire suppression systems (AFSS) in London's buildings. I am writing to you to send you a copy of the final report from the review, *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step towards safer homes*, and to ask for your support in taking the recommendations forward.

Our report looks at the benefits AFSS offer as an additional layer of fire safety in London's homes. You rightly made the case in your response to our call for evidence that not only does AFSS save lives, it also allows buildings to be brought more quickly back into use, reducing the damage to residents, housing providers and communities. The evidence we gathered shows how AFSS can also allow for more innovative and flexible building design and represent a tiny cost of a new development, 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 road map towards requiring AFSS in every new residential building in England. That is why we share the London Fire Brigade's position that AFSS should be required in all new residential buildings over 18 metres – 6 floors – high in England. We are also calling for AFSS to be required in new care homes and sheltered housing to protect the most

¹ London Assembly Planning Committee *Never Again: Sprinklers as the next step in fire safety* video

vulnerable in society. We are also calling for the Mayor to include a strong presumption in his new London Plan that such buildings will have AFSS installed.

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.

As part of this road map, the report recommends that the Government should require AFSS to be fitted in tall buildings, care homes and sheltered housing during refurbishment work. However, requiring AFSS to be retrofitted in every existing building is not immediately feasible. Retrofitting sprinklers in buildings over 30 metres high in London alone 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.

Some buildings will require urgent action to ensure they are better protected from fire. We recommend that the Mayor develops a new risk-based £50 million 'London Sprinkler Retrofitting Fund'. The primary goal of this £50 million fund should be to enable housing providers to fit AFSS to where residents are most vulnerable to fire and there are exceptional costs or challenges in doing the retrofit. The report suggests that the London Fire Brigade's 'concerns, consequences and controls' approach to risk could serve as a guide to assessing which buildings qualify for funding.

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 would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support with this review. The information and advice given by officers from the London Fire Brigade has been invaluable to our evidence gathering. I would also like to thank you for the vocal support you have given for AFSS and the work you do every day to encourage its greater use in London's buildings.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,



Navin Shan AM

Rapporteur for the London Assembly Planning Committee

CC: Fiona Twycross, Chair of LFEPA