

Scoop of the year

Government did not act after warning about Grenfell-style cladding

<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/government-did-not-act-after-warning-about-grenfell-style-cladding-in-2014-minutes-reveal-57433>

While speaking to a contact, Pete was told about a meeting where the government had been specifically warned that its guidance did not outlaw Grenfell-style cladding.

His source was unable to provide the minutes to this meeting himself, but he was able to provide crucial specifics – including its date, title and (pertinently) the name of a civil servant to whom the minutes had recently been emailed. This enabled Pete to obtain the document through an extremely precise Freedom of Information Act.

What it revealed was damning. After Grenfell, the government had been quick to insist that the cladding which covered the tower was “banned” by UK building regulations – with ministers reacting with shock to the news that it was so widely used.

These minutes torpedoed that claim. They show the government was specifically told by industry experts as early as 2014 that if it wanted to ban *the very material* used on Grenfell, they needed to update guidance – something which they never did. They were warned that without this change, the guidance was being interpreted to permit use of the product.

The story was described as a “devastating” revelation by survivors of the blaze. It was shared hundreds of times on Twitter and was immediately followed up by national papers including *The Daily Mirror* and *The Times*. *Channel 4 News* dedicated part of its evening broadcast to the story, with Pete appearing on air.

The story was particularly significant for the built environment industry – who had previously been taking the blame from government for not following guidance. Instead this turned the debate on its head – it was government officials that had refused to heed warnings from the industry.

This is an important revelation, then, about accountability for the fire and the potential cost of missed warnings.

INSIDE HOUSING

Lord Porter speaks

The Tory council leader tell us why he gives his party a hard time over housing
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Breaking the silence

A housing officer gives us the inside steer on the homelessness crisis
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Officials warned about ACM cladding in 2014

Cladding Government failed to act following meeting hosted by industry experts four years ago

Peter Apps

The government failed to act on a specific warning about the deadly cladding used on Grenfell three years before the fire, a document released to *Inside Housing* has revealed.

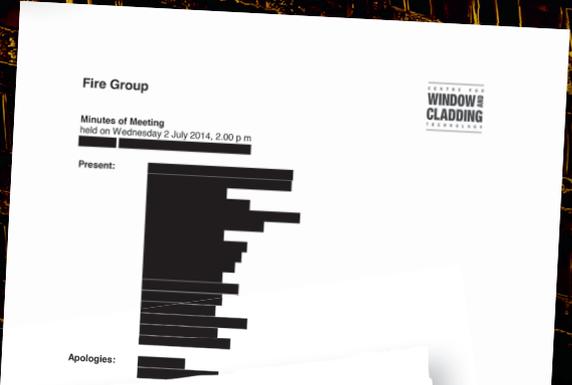
Seventy-two people died when flames ripped through aluminium and polyethylene panels attached to the outside of Grenfell Tower, in west London, in June last year.

Since the fire, the government has insisted its guidance 'banned' the use of this combustible aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding - which has been compared to solid petrol by experts. But *Inside Housing* has obtained the minutes of a 2014 meeting

hosted by industry body the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology, which prove officials were warned the guidance was being interpreted to permit its use. Officials were told it "is not clear from the wording of the current clause" that the material was banned, and advised a clarification should be issued, which was never done.

Edward Daffarn, a survivor and part of Grenfell United, said: "To see the government was warned about the dangers of using this type of cladding years before the fire, before the refurbishment, is devastating."

→ Continued on page 2



Use of ACM on high rise buildings
ACM refers to aluminium composite material. The normal material consists of two skins of aluminium approx. 0.5mm thick separated by a polyethylene core 2 to 5mm thick. This material generally achieves a reaction to fire classification of class 0 or class B s1 d0. There are versions available with a mineral core which can achieve A2 s1 d0. There are also similar materials available with other metals such as copper used for the facing.

There have been major fires in buildings in various parts of the world including the Middle East and France where ACM materials have been used for the cladding with the ACM responsible for external fire spread.

...12.7 of ADB is intended to prohibit the use of polyethylene preceded by a heading 'Insulation Materials/Products' which implies that it only applies to insulation. The wording of the main text refers to filler materials which could be taken to include the polyethylene core but this is not clear.
It was suggested that clarification could be achieved by means of a FAQ. Approved Documents can be downloaded from <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>. The page for each Approved document also has a FAQ section related to that Approved Document. [redacted] agreed to raise this with [redacted].
How would this affect other materials used for rainscreen panels e.g. high pressure laminate?

→ Home improvements for the vulnerable, p22

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Wales

Wales works on grant solution

Welsh Government looks at alternative to merging all funding streams

Nathaniel Barker

The Welsh Government is carrying out work to establish a new housing-related services grant, as an alternative to controversial proposals to merge current funding streams.

Ministers previously proposed rolling 10 separate grants - housing and non-housing-related - into an Early Intervention, Prevention and Support Grant from 2019/20.

This would include Supporting People - a £125m programme which sees local authorities given cash to fund housing-related support services for people vulnerable to becoming homeless, as well as older and disabled people.

The Welsh Government claims 57,000 people a year are helped by the scheme.

Some providers have raised concerns that the grant merger could lead to cuts in funding for vital support services, as cash-strapped councils focus the funds on more politically popular areas.

A report by the Welsh Assembly's Public Accounts Committee in May said the changes risk "letting down vulnerable and elderly people" and create uncertainty for the organisations involved.

Ten housing and homelessness bodies in Wales, including Community Housing Cymru, the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru and Shelter Cymru, later made the case for an alternative to the poverty prevention mega grant.

The Homelessness and Housing-Related Support Grant, they suggested, would merge Supporting People, the Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rent Smart Wales and short-term supported accommodation grants.

The bodies claimed this would help safeguard the future of services while helping the Welsh Government achieve its target to reduce the number of different grant streams it manages.

A spokesperson for the Welsh Government told *Inside Housing* it is "undertaking work to understand how a separate grant focusing only on housing-related services might meet the aims of our grant integration work".

It is understood that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) - which has expressed support for the Early Intervention, Prevention and Support Grant - is softening to the idea of a housing-only grant.

"WLGA is aware of the genuine concerns that have been raised about the inclusion of Supporting People and homelessness monies in the EIPSG [Early Intervention, Prevention and Support Grant] from within the housing sector," said Anthony Hunt, finance and resources spokesperson for the WLGA and leader of Torfaen Council.

"Local government hugely values the Supporting People programme and the important work it does to support those at risk of homelessness and those who need housing-related support.

"It is because of this that the WLGA remains open to finding solutions based on agreement across all stakeholders."

Cladding

Government warned about ACM in 2014

→ Continued from front

The notes show that at the meeting, it was said that "there have been major fires in buildings in various parts of the world... where ACM materials have been used for the cladding with the ACM responsible for the external fire spread".

They add that the government responded by claiming it believed Approved Document B - the official guidance on fire safety - banned the use of these materials by stipulating that 'insulation materials/products' should be of limited combustibility.

"There have been major fires... where ACM materials have been used with the ACM responsible for the external fire spread."
Meeting minutes from 2014

This is an argument ministers have advanced since the fire and which many industry figures have rejected.

The notes show this was expressed to officials at the meeting. They say: "The current clause is preceded by a heading 'Insulation Materials/Products' which implies that it only applies to insulation."

They show the Building Research Establishment (BRE) was asked to clarify the guidance by adding to the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section on the government website. A BRE spokesperson said this was because it later decided to make the change through an edit to Approved Document B.

The meeting was held at the same time as the cladding material for the Grenfell refurbishment was being decided, and two years before the refurbishment finished.

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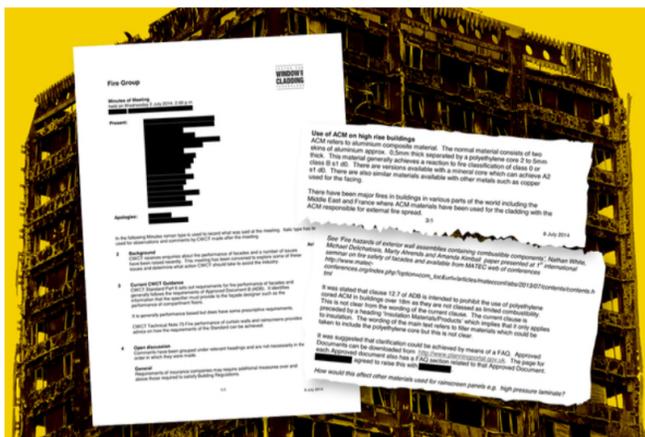
JOBS



Government did not act after warning about Grenfell-style cladding in 2014, minutes reveal

NEWS 02/08/18 6:30 PM BY PETER APPS

The government was told it needed to clarify official guidance to ban Grenfell-style cladding in 2014 but failed to act, minutes released to *Inside Housing* reveal.



Sharelines

Exclusive: government ignored a specific warning about Grenfell-style cladding in 2014, released minutes reveal #ukhousing

The government was told it needed to clarify its official guidance to ban Grenfell-style cladding in 2014 but failed to act #ukhousing

Minutes of a July 2014 meeting held by the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology, show officials were warned guidance was “not clear” regarding the use of deadly aluminium and polyethylene cladding.

The minutes show the Building Research Establishment (BRE) agreed to draft a clarification to clearly outlaw the material – compared to solid petrol by experts – but this was not done.

The aluminium composite material (ACM) polyethylene cladding was fitted onto the outside of Grenfell Tower in a refurbishment which was completed in 2016.

READ MORE



A specific warning about Grenfell-style cladding the government shrugged off



Government removes passage blamed for cladding crisis from new draft guidance



Raab: 'inquiry to decide' whether guidance allows combustible cladding

In June last year, flames ripped through this cladding system engulfing the building in flames and killing 72 people.

The minutes, released to *Inside Housing* under the Freedom of Information Act, say: "There have been major fires in buildings in various parts of the world where ACM materials have been used for the cladding, with the ACM responsible for the external fire spread."

The banner features the Eaton logo on the left with the tagline "Powering Business Worldwide". In the center, the "LiveSafe" logo is displayed above the text "Technology to protect what matters". On the right, there is an image of a medical device and a button that says "Download the white paper".

"It was stated that [official guidance] is intended to prohibit the use of polyethylene-cored ACM in buildings over 18m... This is not clear from the wording of the current clause."

They add that the BRE agreed to draft a 'Frequently Asked Question' for the official website to clarify this point, but this was never done.

The ACM cladding warning: full text

Taken from the minutes of the CWCT Fire Group meeting minutes, held on 2 July 2014, which government officials attended

Use of ACM on high rise buildings

"ACM refers to aluminium composite material. The normal material consists of two skins of aluminium approx. 0.5mm thick separated by a polyethylene core 2 to 5mm thick. This material generally achieves a reaction to fire classification of class 0 or class B s1 d0. There are versions available with a mineral core which can achieve A2 s1 d0. There are also similar materials available with other metals such as copper used for the facing.

"There have been major fires in buildings in various parts of the world including the Middle East and France where ACM materials have been used for the cladding with the ACM responsible for external fire spread.

"It was stated that clause 12.7 of ADB is intended to prohibit the use of polyethylene cored ACM in buildings over 18m as they are not classed as limited combustibility.

"This is not clear from the wording of the current clause. The current clause is preceded by a heading 'Insulation Materials/Products' which implies that it only applies to insulation. The wording of the main text refers to filler materials which could be taken to include the polyethylene core but this is not clear.

"It was suggested that clarification could be achieved by means of a FAQ. Approved Documents can be downloaded from www.planningportal.gov.uk. The page for each Approved Document also has a FAQ section related to that Approved Document. [a representative from the BRE] agreed to raise this with [an official at the Department for Communities and Local Government]"

Square brackets indicate redacted names, which have been confirmed through sources. The full minutes can be downloaded below.

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Reacting, Edward Daffarn, a survivor from the tower and part of campaign group Grenfell United, said: "The more we learn about what happened before Grenfell, from council to government to industry, the more we believe 72 people would be alive today if those in power had done their basic duty.

"To see the government was specifically warned about the dangers of using of this type of cladding years before the fire, before the refurbishment of Grenfell, is devastating. It adds to the growing list of warnings that were ignored."

He added that “there must be no more excuses” over the banning and removal of combustible materials from other towers.

Steve Reed, a Labour MP who has campaigned on cladding, added: “This is damning proof that the government knew their fire safety guidance was flawed and dangerous and yet they did nothing.”

They minutes show government officials believed Approved Document B – the official guidance on fire safety – banned the use of flammable ACM through a clause stipulating that ‘insulation materials/products’ should be of limited combustibility.

However, this argument was rejected by the industry figures present as ACM cladding has no insulation function (see box: the Class 0 debate).

The ‘Class 0’ debate explained



- › Since the Grenfell Tower fire, the government has insisted that its official guidance, Approved Document B, required cladding panels to be of ‘limited combustibility’. But many industry figures disagree, saying the standard the guidance set was ‘Class 0’ or ‘Euroclass B’.
- › Approved Document B sets limited combustibility as the standard for ‘insulation materials/products’ in paragraph 12.7. It sets Class 0 or Euroclass B as the standard for ‘external surfaces’ in paragraph 12.6.
- › Paragraph 12.7 says that “insulation product, filler material etc” must be of limited combustibility. In a letter to social landlords on 22 June, the government said that the word “filler” in this context covered the plastic in between the aluminium sheets in the cladding.
- › But experts have disputed this view, pointing out that the cladding itself does not have an insulation function.
- › The cladding used on Grenfell was certified to Class 0 and so would apparently have met the official standard for external walls.
- › This debate remains crucial in assessing the liability for the removal of cladding, much of which is also rated Class 0, from hundreds of tower blocks nationwide.

The minutes say: “The current clause is preceded by a heading ‘Insulation Materials/Products’ which implies that it only applies to insulation. The working of the main text refers to filler materials which could be taken to include the polyethylene core but this is not clear.”

After the Grenfell Tower blaze, government ministers – including chancellor Philip Hammond – relied on the passages about ‘insulation’ to claim that the cladding on Grenfell was banned.

In a letter to social landlords, sent on 22 June last year, Melanie Dawes, permanent secretary at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), wrote: “For the avoidance of doubt, the core (filler) within an aluminium composite material (ACM) is an ‘insulation material/product’, ‘insulation product’, and/or ‘filler material’ as referred to in Paragraph 12.7... of Approved Document B.”

David Metcalfe, director of the CWCT, who attended the meeting, said: “It may well have been the intention that that the clause prohibited those materials, but the simple fact is that’s not what was written in the guidance – and that is the big problem here.”

Timeline: a short history of cladding and building regulations



- ▶ **January 2000** - Following the tower block fire at Garnock Court - which killed a pensioner with disabilities - a report by the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee concluded that building regulations required "external surfaces (and hence cladding)... should be of a material classified as 'Class O' for spread of fire". It adds: "We do not believe that it should take a serious fire in which many people are killed before all reasonable steps are taken towards minimising the risks [from cladding fires]."
- ▶ **January 2008** - The British Board of Agrément provides a certificate confirming a Class 0 rating for Reynobond PE, the material later installed on Grenfell Tower
- ▶ **March 2013** - The coroner investigating the Lakanal House blaze in south London, which killed six, writes to Eric Pickles, communities secretary, advising him to review official guidance contained in Approved Document B "with particular regard to the spread of fire over the external envelope of a building". Mr Pickles replies, indicating that changes will not be made until "2016/17"
- ▶ **July 2014** - At a meeting of the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology, the government is warned that its guidance is not clear enough to prohibit the use of aluminium composite cladding with a polyethylene core (ACM(PE)) on tall buildings, which has been linked to a number of fires worldwide. The Building Research Establishment agrees to draft an 'FAQ' making it clear that this material is prohibited, but never does.
- ▶ **14 June 2017** - A kitchen fire at Grenfell Tower, west London, spreads to the recently installed ACM(PE) cladding. The resulting fire totally engulfs the building, trapping residents and killing 72 people.
- ▶ **22 June 2017** - The government writes to social landlords claiming ACM(PE) is banned by guidance, despite its failure to clarify this point before the fire. Philip Hammond, chancellor, repeats this claim on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.
- ▶ **17 May 2018** - The government announces plans to ban combustible materials on high rises buildings, and later publishes draft 'clarified' guidance, removing the passage which had been interpreted as permitting 'Class 0' cladding.

Emma Dent Coad, the Labour MP for North Kensington, where Grenfell Tower is located, said: "It is shocking but not altogether surprising that this very clear and prescient advice was totally ignored."

A spokesperson for the BRE said: "We were part of an ongoing discussion around FAQs for the planning portal with CWCT and other experts. This discussion concluded when the online government consultation re Approved Document B (ADB) was launched in February 2016. This was based on the collective view that these issues would best be covered off in the subsequent revision to ADB."

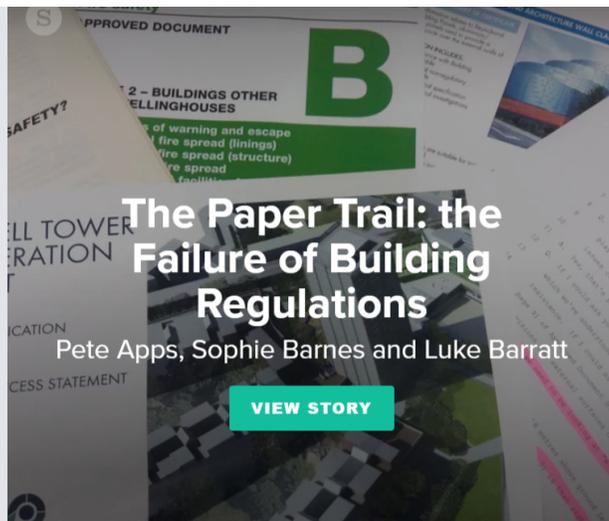
An MHCLG spokesperson said: "As we have said repeatedly, our view is that the limited combustibility requirements in the guidance cover the core filler of a cladding panel."

"We are consulting on a ban on the use of combustible materials in the external walls of high rise residential buildings."

The Paper Trail: The Failure of Building Regulations

Read our in-depth investigation into how building regulations have changed over time and how this may have contributed to the Grenfell Tower fire:





The Paper Trail: the Failure of Building Regulations

Pete Apps, Sophie Barnes and Luke Barratt

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Never Again campaign



In the days following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017, *Inside Housing* launched the Never Again campaign to call for immediate action to implement the learning from the Lakanal House fire, and a commitment to act – without delay – on learning from the Grenfell Tower tragedy as it becomes available.

One year on, we have extended the campaign asks in the light of information that has emerged since.

Here are our updated asks:

GOVERNMENT

- Act on the recommendations from Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations to tower blocks of 18m and higher. Commit to producing a timetable for implementation by autumn 2018, setting out how recommendations that don't require legislative change can be taken forward without delay
- Follow through on commitments to fully ban combustible materials on high-rise buildings
- Unequivocally ban desktop studies
- Review recommendations and advice given to ministers after the Lakanal House fire and implement necessary changes
- Publish details of all tower blocks with dangerous cladding, insulation and/or external panels and commit to a timeline for remedial works. Provide necessary guidance to landlords to ensure that removal work can begin on all affected private and social residential blocks by the end of 2018. Complete quarterly follow-up checks to ensure that remedial work is completed to the required standard. Checks should not cease until all work is completed.
- Stand by the prime minister's commitment to fully fund the removal of dangerous cladding
- Fund the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in all tower blocks across the UK (except where there are specific structural reasons not to

do so)

- Explore options for requiring remedial works on affected private sector residential tower blocks

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Take immediate action to identify privately owned residential tower blocks so that cladding and external panels can be checked

LANDLORDS

- Publish details of the combinations of insulations and cladding materials for all high rise blocks
- Commit to ensuring that removal work begins on all blocks with dangerous materials by the end of 2018 upon receipt of guidance from government
- Publish current fire risk assessments for all high rise blocks (the Information Commissioner has required councils to publish and recommended that housing associations should do the same). Work with peers to share learning from assessments and improve and clarify the risk assessment model.
- Commit to renewing assessments annually and after major repair or cladding work is carried out. Ensure assessments consider the external features of blocks. Always use an appropriate, qualified expert to conduct assessments.
- Review and update evacuation policies and 'stay put' advice in the light of risk assessments, and communicate clearly to residents
- Adopt Dame Judith Hackitt's recommended approach for listening to and addressing tenants' concerns, with immediate effect

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- › G15
- › National Federation of ALMOs
- › National Housing Federation
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