

# London Tenants Federation

## Grenfell Tower

### London Tenants Federation Statement

London Tenants' Federation is shocked and deeply saddened by the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower.

On behalf of the organisations of borough council tenants and leaseholders, housing association tenants, tenant management organizations, coops and others who send delegates to our meetings, we want to express heartfelt sympathy to all the Grenfell residents who lost loved ones, and our deepest regret at the dreadful loss of life in the fire.

Everyone made homeless MUST be rehoused by Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council within the borough with the greatest urgency so that they can begin rebuilding their lives after their appalling experience.

It is distressing to hear that the safety concerns of tenants and leaseholders, expressed many times over years, appear to have been treated lightly, and that those who made their complaints were ignored, regarded as a nuisance and even threatened for raising their concerns. It is time that local authorities and other social landlords encouraged and welcomed the input of their residents as far as their homes are concerned.

The process of starving borough tenants' federations of money and closing them down, the discouragement of tenants' and residents' associations must end. Tenant organisation is vital to the maintenance of safe, good quality public housing, as the tragic case of Grenfell Tower proves.

We expect a thorough investigation of the causes of the Grenfell Tower fire, with tenants and leaseholders enabled to fully participate. But first reports suggest that the fire spread with unprecedented speed and ferocity because cosmetic cladding – aimed, it seems, to make the tower look more palatable to richer residents round about – of the cheapest kind was attached to save money.

Council tenants and leaseholders have been at the sharp end of cuts to council budgets for years. Here they have paid the ultimate price.

The government must take responsibility to fund a thorough examination of the safety standards of all public housing and the rectification of all aspects of upkeep which threaten the residents. It is clear from the inability of Kensington and Chelsea Council to respond meaningfully to the tragedy that council funding is at such a low ebb that substantial government funds will be needed for this to be done properly.

It is, however, very regrettable that there are calls from some quarters for the demolition of all council tower blocks as a response to this tragedy. It should be recalled that until the recent works were undertaken, Grenfell Tower had stood since it was completed in 1974 with no such catastrophe occurring.

The process of 'regeneration' – demolition of council and housing association estates – has already cost thousands of Londoners their homes, as London Tenants Federation shows in its recent publication 'Holding on to the homes we have now and why'. Council homes have been lost only to be replaced with luxury dwellings far beyond the budgets of the former residents and most other Londoners. The Heygate Estate in Southwark is just the most notorious of these regeneration schemes – 1200 council homes lost, twice as many to replace them, but only 82 of them social rented housing.

And any Londoner must have observed that residential towers far higher than Grenfell Tower are going up all over the city – only full of luxury dwellings often sold off to investors.

Demolition should not be required to make council tenants' and leaseholders' homes fit to live in. The process of run-down of public housing has to end.

In 'Holding on to the homes we have now and why' we recommend refurbishment as opposed to demolition. Proper refurbishment should not be confused with botch jobs on the cheap, if the so-called refurbishment of Grenfell Tower is proven to fall into this category, as appears to be the case.

Nor should the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation responsible for Grenfell Tower be confused with the many tenant management organizations up and down the country which mainly manage one estate, often to the satisfaction of the residents.

KCTMO was in charge of all of Kensington and Chelsea's council housing, 10,000 properties. Set up in the 1990s, it bears more similarity to the arm's length management organisations set up by many councils, most of which have now ended the ALMO contracts to bring their housing back to direct council management.

The housing crisis demonstrates that public housing is essential to meet the housing needs of many people in London and the country as a whole. It is time to end its run down, in numbers and in upkeep. More public housing needs to be built and what is there still needs to be properly maintained. A promise to do our utmost to make sure this happens is the least we owe to the residents of Grenfell Tower.

**Address:** 50 Memorial Avenue, West Ham, London E15 3BS **Telephone:** 07931 214 913

**Email:** [info@londontenants.org](mailto:info@londontenants.org) **Web address:** [www.londontenants.org](http://www.londontenants.org)

*London Tenants is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England / Wales No 8155382*