# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Phase 1 Welsh Building Safety Fund- Fire Safety Building Passports** |
| **DATE**  | **14 July 2021** |
| **BY** | **Julie James Minister for Climate Change** |

Building safety is a priority for this Government, and today I am able to provide Members with an update on our work. Members will be aware of the complex challenges facing multi-occupied buildings across the UK. They will also be aware of the steps already taken here in Wales to provide support to residents of flats with identified safety defects. This has included ensuring that all identified buildings with ACM cladding have or will soon be remediated at no additional costs to leaseholders. As well as making £10.5m available last year to remediate affected buildings in the social sector which saw 12 buildings access this support.

We have worked closely with our counterparts in the UK Government to bring forward legislation that will apply in Wales in relation to fire safety through the Home Office’s Fire Safety Act and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Building Safety Bill laid just last week. These legislative reforms start the journey that we will be making to ensure that future buildings are built, maintained and managed in a way that prioritises the safety of residents. We will be introducing further legislative reforms for Wales by a Senedd Bill later in this Senedd term.

Despite this progress, we do not yet know exactly how many buildings are affected by fire safety defects and to what extent. It is critically important that we are able to understand the true scale of the problem in order to properly address it. To this end I am announcing Phase 1 of the Welsh Building Safety Fund. This essential first stage will provide grant funding for fire safety surveys. Every building is different and the fire safety surveys will identify what measures and actions are required to make a multi-residential building as safe as it can be and protect lives and property in the event of a fire.

For too long residents of affected buildings have been denied the right to confidence in the safety of their homes. A focus solely on cladding, as is the case in England, will only partly restore that confidence and this is not good enough. Here in Wales, the surveys we will fund will adopt a more holistic approach and include an assessment of internal defects such as ineffective compartmentation. They will also identify where fire suppression and evacuation alert systems might be required. This will provide a clear picture of the remediation measures needed, as well as interventions which will further promote safety for residents.

Responsible persons such as landlords and managing agents are already under a legal duty to assess the risk of fire in their properties, and to act accordingly. The surveys we will fund will build on and go further than those assessments, for premises with particularly complex, severe or difficult problems. The findings from a fire safety survey will inform the creation of a “Fire Safety - Building Passport”. The Passport will be developed by responsible persons/ building owners/ managing agents and will set out what defects have been identified, what remedial action is required, when the fire safety measures can, and need to be implemented, and how they could align with other works required for the building, including planned maintenance and potential decarbonisation measures. In effect, the Passport will provide a ‘single point of truth’ on not only what is required to make buildings safe from fire, but also set out a proposed schedule and timeline of works bespoke to that building. This clarity is vital for residents who will be able to access clear and coherent information on their building’s remediation plans, and to help us target further support according to robust evidence and assessment of risk.

I believe this phased programme of support is the best way to ensure that we target remediation funding effectively to support leaseholders.

Whilst we will initially prioritise high rise residential buildings, we know that these issues do not just manifest at 18 metres. This is why this grant funding will also be available for medium rise multi-occupied buildings (11m+).

The scheme will be open for expressions of interest from responsible persons/ building owners/ management companies this Autumn.

I remain acutely aware of the significant impact these issues are having on affected residents, both financially and on their health and wellbeing. We remain committed to supporting leaseholders and residents in Wales. We are developing a remediation fund which will form the next phase of our programme of support. I will announce the details of this next phase of the Welsh Building Safety Fund in the Autumn.

Developers still have a clear role to play in contributing to addressing safety defects where they exist in order to protect leaseholders from costs. I have been pleased to see a number of developers have set aside funds for this and they have set an example that others should follow. However, I believe there is more that can, and should, be done by developers. I intend to hold a roundtable with developers later in the year and will continue to impress upon them the importance of stepping up to meet their responsibilities.

I am also yet to receive confirmation from UK Government on the level and timing of any consequential funding Wales may receive as a result of announcements by the UK Government earlier this year; this is despite repeated requests for clarity. This is an issue for leaseholders across the United Kingdom and it is only right that Wales receives its fair share. I will continue to call for this and will inform Members when we have more information. But I will not allow the UK Government’s delay to hold us up. We will continue to work with key stakeholders and industry experts to develop the next phase of our building safety fund. We are also considering a buyout scheme to support leaseholders who are impacted by building safety and would prefer to sell their property.

Our remediation programme is being developed in tandem with our legislative plans to reform the existing building safety system, to ensure residents of multi-occupied buildings in Wales do not encounter these problems in the future. I want to thank all those who contributed their views to our important consultation on the Building Safety Regime. We are in the process of reviewing and considering responses to help us shape this new system and will continue these important conversations as our work on this progresses.