

Government u-turn on Grenfell Recommendations will cost lives of Disabled People

In October last year, Robert Jenrick MP the Housing Minister, confirmed that Ministers would implement the recommendations put forward in the Grenfell Tower Phase 1 Inquiry's first report "in full" and "without delay".

However the Home Office fire safety consultation proposals will make matters worse for high-rise vulnerable residents and fire-fighters.

Current legislation requires that everyone must be able to evacuate the building - including disabled people.

The Grenfell Tragedy in 2017, cost 72 lives and destroyed many families. Almost a third of those who died were vulnerable residents, none of whom had a personal emergency evacuation plans or assisted escape devices to aid them to evacuate.

The EHRC stated in their [submission](#) to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry that they believe that the Government's Equality and Non-discrimination duties were breached during the Grenfell Tower Fire. Avoidable deaths were the direct result of the absence of any plan for the evacuation of

- disabled people
- elderly people
- pregnant women
- women with (particularly very young) children

To address these issues, a key Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendation contained in Chapter 12 (33.22) of their report overview states:

"that the owner and manager of every high-rise residential building be required by law to prepare personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) for all residents whose ability to self-evacuate may be compromised (such as persons with reduced mobility or cognition)."

There are 163,632 vulnerable residents living in high risk buildings who require Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs). However, the [Consultation Exercise](#) for implementing this recommendation, published last week by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, proposes that PEEPs should only be legally required for just 5,328 disabled people living in high-rise buildings where there is a Waking Watch present.

This approach means that 158,304 people must wait for evacuation by the Fire and Rescue Services but there will be no legal requirement for PEEPs to be prepared in advance for their safe evacuation and contradicts the Draft Building Safety Bill, which focuses on increased fire protection for all residents.

More seriously for the Fire and Rescue Services, the [Fire Safety: Call for Evidence](#) proposes that the only requirement, in future, will be for the building manager to provide details of the disabled person's location to the Fire and Rescue Services.

These proposals transfer the legal responsibility for the safe evacuation of vulnerable residents from building managers to fire-fighters.

- how this legal requirement will work in practice remains unclear. Questions remain on: who will have the legal responsibility for the purchase of assisted escape devices, essential for the safe evacuation of many disabled people
- how evacuation plans for disabled people will be tested
- how firefighters will be trained on the use of diverse escape devices
- whether increased budgets will be available to the FRS for these new duties.
- will individual firefighters be liable to prosecution for gross negligence manslaughter charges in the event of an injury or death of a disabled person during an evacuation?
- will Fire and Rescue Services be open to claims from fire-fighters injured if they have not been trained properly to undertake evacuation of vulnerable residents.

Importantly, there also will be a conflict of interest between the FRS enforcement duties and investigation duties with their new legal responsibilities .

The Government has further confirmed that they have failed in their Statutory Duty to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment of their proposals, merely stating that they "expect" there to be a positive equality impact.