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BUILDING SAFETY CRISIS BRIEFING 3

The building safety crisis refers to a range of safety issues identified in buildings for multiple occupancy of varied heights, including problems with: flammable cladding, insulation, fire breaks, cavity barriers, compartmentation, fire doors, and balconies.



LEVELLING DOWN LIFE CHANCES

SUMMARY

- The choices and opportunities available to leaseholders are being levelled down by the building safety crisis, with some expecting to be worse off than their parents
- The slow pace of funding decisions and support means that leaseholders will continue to face disruption for many years as they await remediation
- Leaseholders remain trapped and face significant uncertainty; some questioned whether remediation would really restore confidence and trust in the leasehold sector

POLICY SOLUTIONS

- Legislative protection for all leaseholders from the costs associated with remediation of cladding and other safety problems, to ensure the completion of all work to make buildings safe
- Extension of financial support to all impacted buildings, including those under 11m
- Forward funding by Government to facilitate swift and risk-based remediation

GENERATIONAL DAMAGE TO LIFE CHANCES

The building safety crisis has undermined the belief in the housing market as a relatively stable and secure building block of a future life. Many leaseholders put their life savings into a deposit for a flat, believing that this would deliver greater security and control over their lives. But many now face a future in which their life chances have been levelled down by leasehold – expecting to be worse off than their parents, with life choices and opportunities being closed off rather than opened out by the purchase of their home.

“This is the first time that I realised actually I’m not going to be any better off than my parents are...I felt like I’ve been quite successful in my life, up to this point. I’m well educated, I’ve got a decent job, but all of that has just suddenly become so fragile”

Ed, age 35-44, London

LIFE PLANS ON HOLD

Many leaseholders first found out about problems in their buildings when they tried to sell their home. Being unable to move has left them not only physically trapped, but also resulted in major life plans – such as having children, retiring, or moving for work – being put on hold. Whilst Government support to remediate buildings has been extended, gaps remain in protections for leaseholders. Even if all funding was available tomorrow, remediation is likely to take many years to complete before individuals are able to sell their homes and move on. Leaseholders will therefore continue to face significant disruption to their lives and futures over the coming years, with the negative impacts we know are associated with this crisis.

“In some ways it’s worse because I’m older. I want to move to a flat that’s easy for me to look after...I’m [in my 70s] now, I feel like time’s running out, I could’ve sold my flat in early 2020, but I’ve just had to put it all on hold because of this”

Rose, age 54+, London

UNCERTAINTY

Leaseholders continue to face significant uncertainty about the immediate and long-term implications of remediation. This is a key driver of mental harm. The pace of decision-making around funding for remediation has been slow, and many leaseholders had no idea when work may start to remedy the problems in their buildings. Some were still trying to find out what the problems were. The scale of the building safety crisis, the specialist skills needed to survey buildings and undertake remediation, as well as demand for building materials, means that many cannot imagine a near future in which they are free. Until this happens, leaseholders remain trapped, unable to move on with their lives, and unable to see an end to the crisis that they are living with.

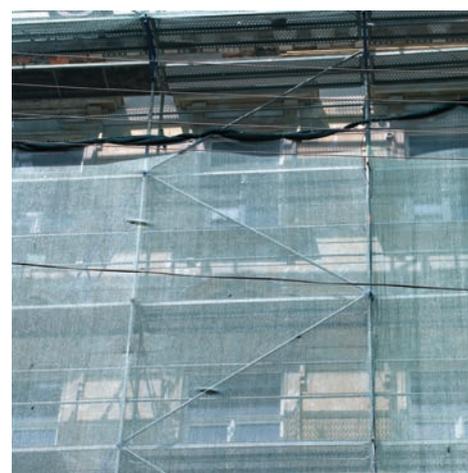
“What are the works going to be like? What’s it going to be like to live in a building site?...I’ve seen pictures of blocks that are going through it already, just covered in plastic sheeting...It’s just complete darkness...no natural light. Sometimes, they can’t even open the windows”

Ellen, age 25-34, Hertfordshire

Individuals also questioned whether remediation would restore confidence and trust in leasehold flats as a safe purchase. They had bought properties trusting in the systems of regulation and certification for buildings. Testimony to the Grenfell Tower inquiry has shown that there have been catastrophic failures here. And yet, leaseholders are being asked to trust in that same system as buildings are remediated.

“Why would I trust these people again to fix the problem correctly?...I bought [my flat] on the very basic presumption that it was safe...When I get these works done...how do we know it’s solving the problem? How do we know they’re not going to come back in five years’ time and say, ‘oh sorry, the standards have changed again...so we need to do this now’?”

Lauren, age 35-44, London



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This briefing is based on in-depth interviews with leaseholders in England impacted by the building safety crisis, living in buildings of different heights. The full report can be found here: housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/living-through-the-building-safety-crisis/

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