

# Safe as houses? Building safety in Wales

**MAY 2025**

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## Summary

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Though high-rise tower blocks with combustible cladding are less common in Wales than England, fire safety is still a concern for tenants and landlords.

Leaseholders, meanwhile, accuse private building owners of brushing aside their concerns about safety defects and even crumbling buildings.

With a Building Safety Bill due to be introduced in the Senedd before the July recess, this briefing looks at progress made in improving fire safety in homes and other buildings in Wales since the Grenfell fire in 2017.

This briefing is aimed primarily at Welsh HQN members but may be of interest in other parts of the UK.

## Key points

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- More than £200m allocated for fire safety improvements and other remediation work in Wales since 2021
- Most awarded to housing associations and local authorities for work on residential blocks
- All residential buildings 11 metres or more in height are eligible for Welsh government money to tackle fire safety defects, including cladding removal
- Leaseholders say they are ‘forgotten victims’ of post-Grenfell crisis with pace of work on privately-owned blocks criticised by chair of Senedd local government and housing committee
- Eleven private developers have committed to carry out work on about 150 buildings, but work had been completed in just three cases
- Building safety bill due to be introduced in Senedd shortly, covering responsibilities of contractors and designers and new enforcement powers for local authorities.

# Introduction

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Along with the UK and Scottish governments, the Welsh government has come under increasing pressure since the fire at Grenfell eight years ago to improve the safety of tower blocks and other housing.

Though [the Building Safety Act 2022](#) was primarily aimed at homes and other buildings in England, part three of the act also applies in Wales.

Specifically, the act:

- Gives ministers in Wales the power to define a higher-risk building
- Requires local authorities in Wales to inspect and carry out work on higher-risk buildings
- Requires the registration of building control staff, plus the setting of a code of conduct and competency standards.

In 2021, the Welsh government [published a White Paper](#) promising to improve safety for residents in multi-occupied buildings.

This was based on proposals drawn up by a building safety expert group, set up in response to Grenfell and including representatives from Community Housing Cymru and the Welsh Local Government Association.

Ministers also launched a [building safety fund](#) to pay for surveys of building safety and remediation of internal and external fire safety defects.

Part of the Welsh building safety programme, more than £200m has so far been allocated for safety work in homes owned by social landlords and private companies.

In 2023, ministers announced that any residential building 11 metres or more in height was eligible for money to remediate fire safety defects, including the removal of cladding.

The Welsh government gives updates on work carried out under the safety programme approximately every six months. It is also promising to introduce a Building Safety Bill ahead of this summer's Senedd recess, due on 18 July.

Private developers, meanwhile, are under pressure to sign a contract, drawn up by the Welsh government. This commits them to carry out repairs and other safety work on properties with defects, including those occupied by leaseholders.

# What has happened so far?

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## Remediating buildings

In 2020, the Welsh government estimated there were 147 high-rise residential buildings in Wales that required remediation to reduce the risk of fires, though this turned out to be somewhat short of the true figure.

By this March, 448 buildings had been included in the Welsh building safety programme – 179 owned by housing associations or local authorities and 269 that are privately owned.

[In 42% of cases](#), work had either been completed or was underway. Half were at a planning stage, with the remainder either not requiring work or waiting for the type of work needed to be identified.

Unlike in England, there are not large numbers of high-rise residential blocks in Wales with combustible aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding. There are, however, echoes of actions taken by the UK Government in the policies pursued in Wales.

[In England](#), 2,718 homes owned by housing associations or local authorities that are at least 11 metres high had been identified as having life-critical fire safety cladding defects by the end of March. Work had started on just under half (45%) and had been completed on 857 homes.

To date, 11 private developers have signed the Welsh government's 'pact' or contract, committing them to carry out work on about 150 buildings. By March, work had been completed in three cases and was ongoing on a further 40, with nearly £56m spent on remediation.

Fifty four developers in England have signed a remediation contract drawn up by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

In Scotland, the government [has launched a £10m fund](#) to assess whether social housing and other buildings have dangerous cladding. Further money is promised for remediation work.

## Funding safety work

Since 2021, the Welsh government has committed £208.8m in grant funding for remediation work. Of this, £129m went to housing associations, £71.8m to local authorities and £8m to private builders.

A further £10m has been allocated for fire safety surveys, of which £6.5m has been spent. In addition, private developers that signed the Welsh government contract have spent £55.9m on remediation work.

For the past year, Cardiff City Council [has overseen a building safety loan scheme](#) for developers across Wales, using £20m provided by the Welsh government. To date, however, no money has been borrowed by developers.

In England, the government allocated £5.1bn for a cladding safety scheme. Further money is expected to be raised through a building safety levy, though the introduction of the levy was delayed following protests from housebuilders and will not now come into force until autumn 2026.

## **Building control**

Two years ago, the Auditor General for Wales [flagged up what it described as “cracks in the foundations”](#) of building safety programmes in Wales.

Bodies such as local authorities and fire and rescue services were unable to discharge their responsibilities and ensure buildings were safe, it concluded.

The report criticised the Welsh government for failing to fund building control in the same way as in England. *“The absence of a national framework for monitoring and evaluating building control and building safety means local authorities and their partners are not working to agreed appropriate outcome measures, targets, or benchmarks,”* it said.

The Welsh government was urged to review the ‘mixed market’ approach to building control that operates in England and Wales (using local authority and private building inspectors) and *“analyse the costs, benefits, threats and risks”* involved. In Scotland, building control is overseen entirely by councils.

Subsequently, using powers under the Building Safety Act 2022, the Welsh government introduced new standards and codes of conduct for building control officers.

It also became mandatory for building inspectors and private building control companies to register with the UK Building Safety Regulator if they wish to oversee building work in Wales. But this has not pacified all critics.

Last year, the Senedd public accounts and public administration committee questioned whether building control posts were attracting enough qualified professionals and called for a national building safety workforce plan.

*“It is vitally important that more is done to ensure that the industry remains an attractive place to work and attracts new candidates,”* [said the committee](#).

## Angry leaseholders

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In March the chair of the Senedd's local government and housing committee [raised concerns over the pace of remediation work in Wales](#) after meeting leaseholders in the Welsh Cladiators group (see later).

*"Can you set out what action you are taking to ensure that developers are undertaking remediation works and whether you have considered introducing sanctions for inaction?"* asked John Griffiths, in a letter to Jane Bryant, cabinet secretary for housing and local government.

Around the same time, in response to criticism from leaseholders, the Welsh government announced it was [setting up a leaseholder resident group](#). The first meeting was held in April, with about 60 leaseholders attending on a remote basis.

## Voices from the sector

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### Tenants urged to report fire risks

Five years ago, Community Housing Cymru produced a template for how tenants and housing associations might work together over fire safety.

While landlords should show a commitment to improving the safety of homes, tenants could also play a crucial part, said the report Safety First in Housing.

[The report called for transparency and co-operation](#), with associations telling residents about smoke alarms and evacuation procedures and tenants giving staff easy access to properties. *"All residents and staff at all levels should feel confident to report safety issues and there should be clear processes to raise concerns,"* it said.

Five years on, housing associations have received the lion's share of money awarded by the Welsh government for building safety (see above). This is being spent on a range of work, including evacuation lifts, fire safety doors, new electrical systems and sprinklers.

In 2023/24, Pobl Group spent £837,000 on remediation work on 246 homes. High-risk properties had been made safe in previous years.

Bethan Proctor, head of policy at CHC, says it is important for landlords to look at all safety issues, not just cladding. Associations have acted as quickly as possible to address concerns raised by residents, she adds.

Now associations are waiting to see what further requirements emerge in the Building Safety Bill and the extent to which they have to cover costs from their own budgets. *“We want to make homes as safe as possible, but we can’t do it without support from the Welsh government,”* she says.

### **Disgruntled leaseholders criticise pace of safety work**

Leaseholders in Cardiff and other parts of Wales regard themselves as the forgotten victims of the post-Grenfell fire safety crisis.

They include residents living at the Celestia development in Cardiff Bay, who have been arguing with developers, builders and the Welsh government for the past five years.

Celestia fails miserably to live up to its name, claims Mark Thomas, who leads the Welsh Cladators Group, set up to lobby for safer homes in the same way as the End Our Cladding Scandal campaign in England.

Residents are not only concerned about fire risk, but the crumbling state of some apartments, built less than 20 years ago. A court case brought against developer Barratt Redrow by residents began this May.

According to Thomas, the Welsh government prioritised social housing with safety problems over privately-owned flats. While ten developers signed the pact promising to remediate unsafe buildings, progress has been slow, he says, due to the government adopting a “light touch” approach.

Thomas hopes the forthcoming Building Safety Bill will have teeth and provide leaseholders and others with more opportunity to take on private companies. *“The Welsh government resisted being tough with developers,”* he says. *“The only solution is tougher legislation and sanctions against developers.”*

## **What happens next?**

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### **The Building Safety (Wales) Bill**

The Welsh government has been promising for more than year that a Building Safety Bill will be introduced before this summer’s recess.

Last year, Julie James, the then minister for climate change, said the Welsh government intends to go significantly further than the building safety regime introduced in England, with all houses in multiple occupation protected, not just those at least 11 metres tall.

[In a written statement to the Senedd](#), she said: “Our new regime will capture all multi-occupied residential buildings in Wales which contain two or more residential units regardless of height. Any buildings exempt from the new regime will be clearly set out in legislation.”

The bill would establish “a robust and coherent regulatory system”, creating clear lines of accountability and imposing statutory duties on relevant ‘duty holders’ in multi-occupied residential buildings. “Lessons from the Grenfell tragedy highlighted the need for clear accountability in relation to those who own and manage relevant buildings,” added James.

Since 2023, the Welsh government has been committed to addressing fire safety in all homes that are 11 metres or higher – but extending regulations to any property with two or more homes will have major financial implications.

[A consultation](#) on building control for higher-risk buildings and wider building regulations concluded on 25 May. This included the following issues that are likely to be included in the bill:

- Responsibilities of duty holders (including contractors and designers) and competency requirements
- Establishing a ‘golden thread’ of higher-risk building information
- New gateway procedures to ensure tighter control over higher-risk building work
- New compliance and stop notices to provide additional enforcement powers for local authorities
- New processes for local authorities wanting to carry out higher-risk building work
- Wider changes to building regulations including public bodies carrying out higher-risk building work.

Many of the proposals that are likely to be included in the bill, including the introduction of ‘accountable persons’, are in line with recommendations made following the Grenfell Inquiry. In some cases, they already feature in UK law and apply to high-rise blocks in England.

### **Points to consider**

- Have you surveyed all your homes for fire safety defects? How many require further remediation and/or other work?
- To what extent have you communicated with residents over fire safety? Are tenants and leaseholders actively encouraged to raise concerns over the safety of flats and other properties?
- Are you prepared for requirements likely to be included in the Building Safety Bill? What will it mean for you in terms of working with designers and contractors and providing more extensive information?
- What are the potential implications of safety regulations extending to all homes in multiple occupation?

## Conclusion

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Measures to improve fire safety in Wales have moved along at a somewhat sluggish pace since the fire at Grenfell in 2017.

Ministers, social landlords and other building owners seem aware of the need to take action and address the concerns of residents, especially those living in high-rise blocks.

But the pace of change has not always reflected the urgency of the situation, or the potential consequences if fire safety defects are not tackled.

Since Grenfell, governments in different parts of the UK have generally moved at their own pace when it comes to fire or building safety.

The sums paid out by the Welsh government, mostly to social landlords, are not inconsiderable. But, as in England, leaseholders whose homes are owned by private developers are having to fight hard for results.

The Building Safety Bill promised in the next few weeks gives the government and the housing sector in Wales the opportunity to show it is in tune with the recommendations of the Grenfell Inquiry, already accepted in England.

However, it will take time for further regulations to take effect and for landlords and building owners to be able to truly demonstrate that homes of all tenures in Wales are indeed as safe as houses.

## Further reading

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- [The final phase two report of the Grenfell Inquiry](#)
- [The UK Government's response](#), published in February
- [A report looking at the UK Government's response](#), by the House of Commons housing, communities and local government committee.

## About the author

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