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1. Review of fire safety rules pledged by minister last year yet to be published; Regulations 'badly need updating', say critics, but review promised by PM's new chief of staff Gavin Barwell has not appeared
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Review of fire safety rules pledged by minister last year yet to be published; Regulations 'badly need updating', say critics, but review promised by PM's new chief of staff Gavin Barwell has not appeared London fire - latest updates What we know so far Fire engulfs the Grenfell - in pictures

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Body

Theresa May's newly-appointed chief of staff promised last year that the government would review fire safety regulations, but the changes have yet to be published.

Gavin Barwell, who was housing minister before losing his seat in last week's general election, was swiftly made the prime minister's new main aide, following the departure of the much-criticised predecessors, Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy.

Following the massive and fast-spreading fire at Grenfell Tower in west London, in which at least six people have died, some fire safety experts have suggested that delays to the regulations could have made such tower blocks more deadly in a fire.

Barwell told the Commons in October that part B of the building regulations, which cover fire safety, would be reviewed as part of a process following a 2009 fire at a tower block.

The blaze at Lakanal House in Camberwell, south-east London, killed six people, with an inquest finding it spread because botched renovations compromised fire stopping between the flats.

"We have not set out any formal plans to review the building regulations as a whole, but we have publicly committed ourselves to reviewing part B following the Lakanal House fire," Barwell said. However, since then his department has not published any review.

Dr Jim Glocking, technical director of the Fire Protection Association (FPA), an industry body, said his organisation had been pushing for a review of fire-related building regulations for some time.

"While we have lobbied long and hard to changes to building regulations, the groups responsible have remained resolutely intransigent to opening up a review," he said.

"Various ministers have said over the years that there will be an imminent review, but it keeps being put on hold, in spite of organisations like ourselves campaigning very hard."

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Among the areas the FPA wanted reviewed, Glocking said, was a lack of compulsion for external insulation underneath cladding on tower blocks to be fire resistant, and tighter regulations over timber-framed buildings, now the most common method for social housing.

Ronnie King, formerly the chief fire officer and now honorary secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on fire safety and rescue, said the regulations "badly need updating" and "three successive ministers have not done it".

He told the Press Association: "It's sad that we always have to go to stable-door legislation. Lakanal House wasn't enough deaths to trigger off a major public inquiry. It just went to an inquest, there was no formal report on it."

On the delay to the review of building regulations, King said: "My own thinking is there was the red tape challenge and they don't really want to put regulation on to businesses, adding a burden. It's one of those that if you bring in a new regulation, you have got to give three up to get it."

King said one recommendation from the all-party parliamentary group was fitting sprinklers to high rise buildings.

"Buildings like the one today over 30 metres, when they are new, would require fire suppression installed. But there are 4,000 older tower blocks in the UK that don't have sprinklers," he said.

"There are people who would argue that it's too costly and there are other measures that could have been done but it's a fact that people don't die in sprinkler buildings."

The Department for Communities and Local Government, in which Barwell was a minister, has been contacted for a response.

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