

# The Grenfell Tower fire – an atrocity caused by profit and deregulation



**EPSU Firefighters' Network**  
**December 2018**



# Grenfell Tower fire – summary



- 14 June 2017
- High rise residential building
- 23 floors + basement + roof
- 6 flats per floor
- London – Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Nearly 300 people, residents and visitors in the building
- 72 died
- 40 fire engines
- 260 firefighters



# The fire

00:54 First call – fire in flat 16, 4<sup>th</sup> floor

01:08 Fire broke out of the kitchen window of flat 16

01:14 Fire spread vertically in both directions

01:26 Fire reached Level 23

In 12 minutes: fire spread 19 floors to the roof

The architectural crown caused lateral fire spread to the other sides of the building



# Firefighting operations

Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) = 4 fire appliances – first on scene at 00:59

01:21 Flat 16 fire extinguished

Time	People inside	Fire engines	Other	Station manager	Watch manager	Crew manager	Fire-fighter	Total FFs
00:59	286	2			1	2	7	10
01:08	277	4			2	4	14	20
01:26	209	6			3	6	21	30
01:34	160	7	1 Command Unit 1 Turntable Ladder	1	6	8	25	40
01:39	151	10	1 Fire Rescue Unit	2	9	9	41	61

# Firefighters' search and rescue

02:10	Woman in wheelchair	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor
02:19	Woman, girl (7)	9 <sup>th</sup> floor
02:25	Two men, ladder	5 <sup>th</sup> floor
02:26	Woman	23 <sup>rd</sup> floor
02:26	Girl (5)	20 <sup>th</sup> floor
02:46	Man, woman, girl (4)	14 <sup>th</sup> floor
02:47	Man, woman, 2 girls (8, 12)	12 <sup>th</sup> floor
03:11	Two women	12 <sup>th</sup> floor
03:21	Woman, two boys (7, 12)	12 <sup>th</sup> floor
03:51	Man, woman, two girls (12, 10)	21 <sup>st</sup> floor
03:52	Woman, girl (12)	21 <sup>st</sup> floor



04:47	Man, woman, girl (6)	11 <sup>th</sup> floor
06:05	Man (57)	10 <sup>th</sup> floor
08:07	Blind man (70)	11 <sup>th</sup> floor

# Causes: fire spread

- The fire started in the kitchen of flat 16 around the area of the tall fridge freezer.
- The fire spread to the external cladding through parts of the internal window surround.
- This led to sustained burning of the cladding either within the cavity or on its external surface, or both.
- The rapid upward vertical fire spread was primarily due to the presence of aluminium composite rainscreen cassettes with polyethylene (PE) filler material.

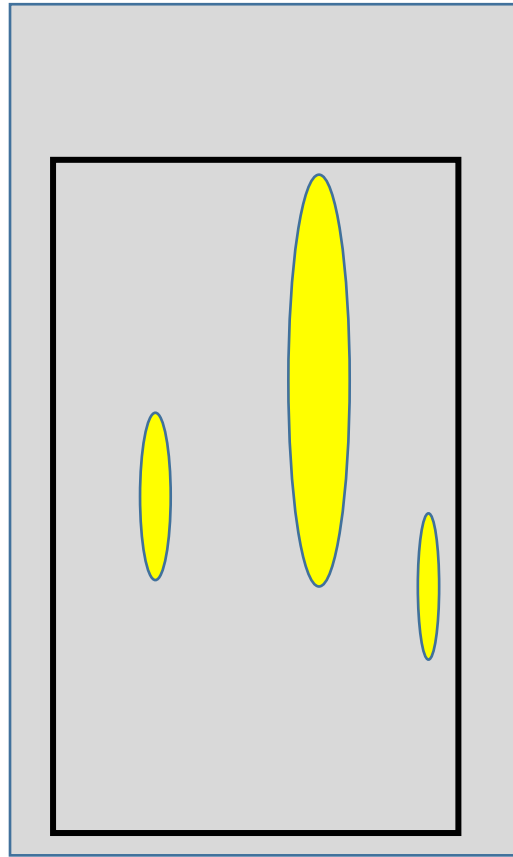




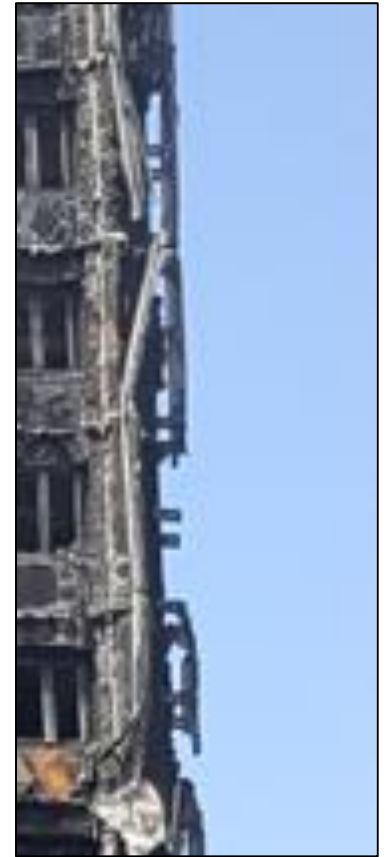
# Causes: the role of cladding



Intense  
flames  
shooting  
up the  
building

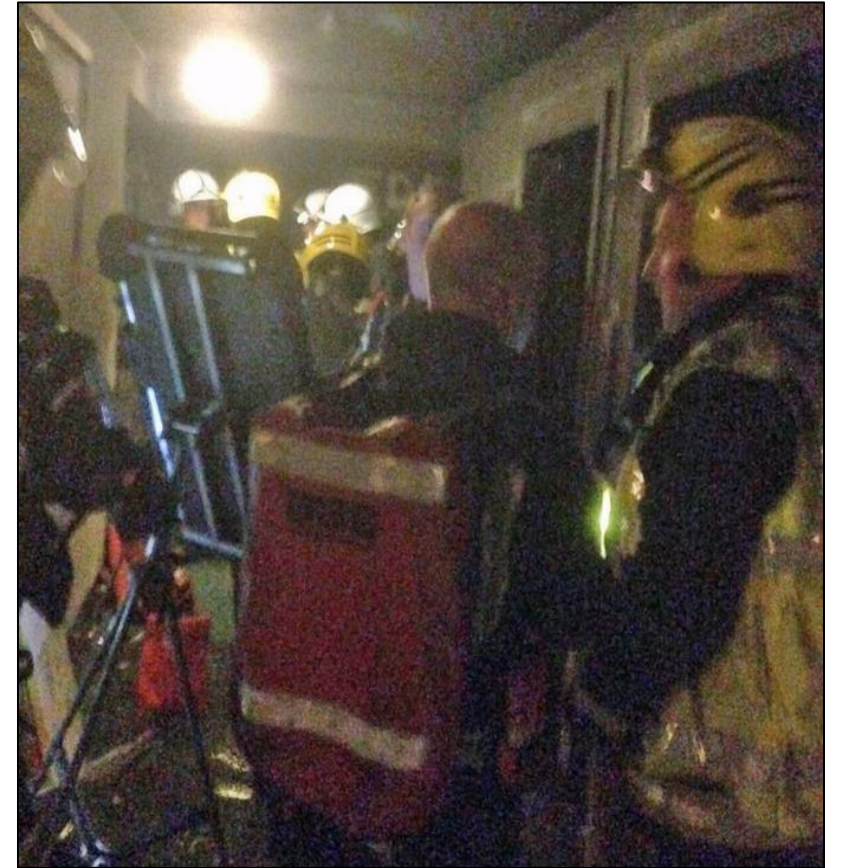


Corner box  
chimneys



# Building failures

- The rainscreen cladding system
- The lining materials around the windows
- Fire resistance of flat fire doors
- Flat fire doors did not self-close
- No help for old or disabled
- A lower standard of stair doors
- Heating system and gas pipes in the stair
- A single stair of 1.04 metres
- Lift override failed
- Dry fire main, instead of a wet riser
- Failure of the lobby smoke control system.



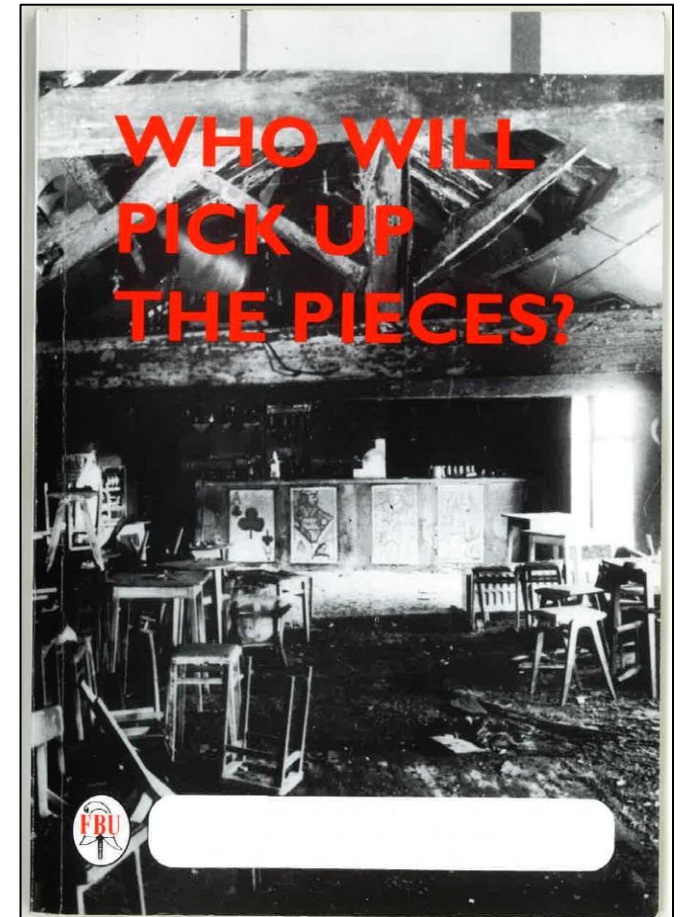


# FBU warnings: cladding

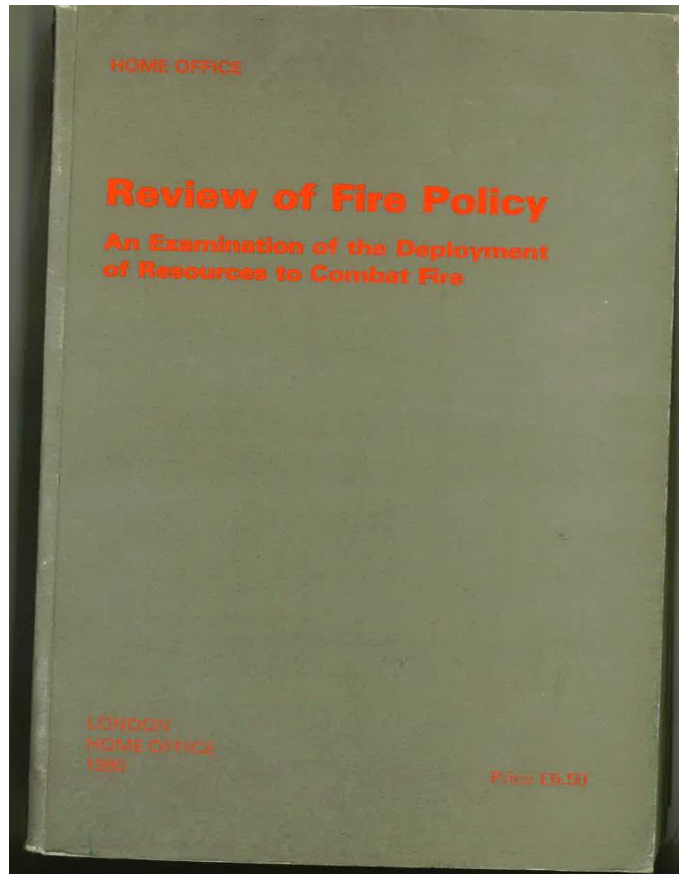
“The primary risk therefore of a cladding system is that of providing a vehicle for assisting uncontrolled fire spread up the outer face of the building, with the strong possibility of the fire re-entering the building at higher levels via windows or other unprotected areas in the face of the building. This in turn poses a threat to the life safety of the residents above the fire floor...

“It is for these reasons that we believe that all cladding used on multi-storey buildings over 25 metres in height and the fixing systems should be completely non-combustible.”

*FBU memorandum, Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs (1999)*



# Deregulation by Tory governments (1979-97)



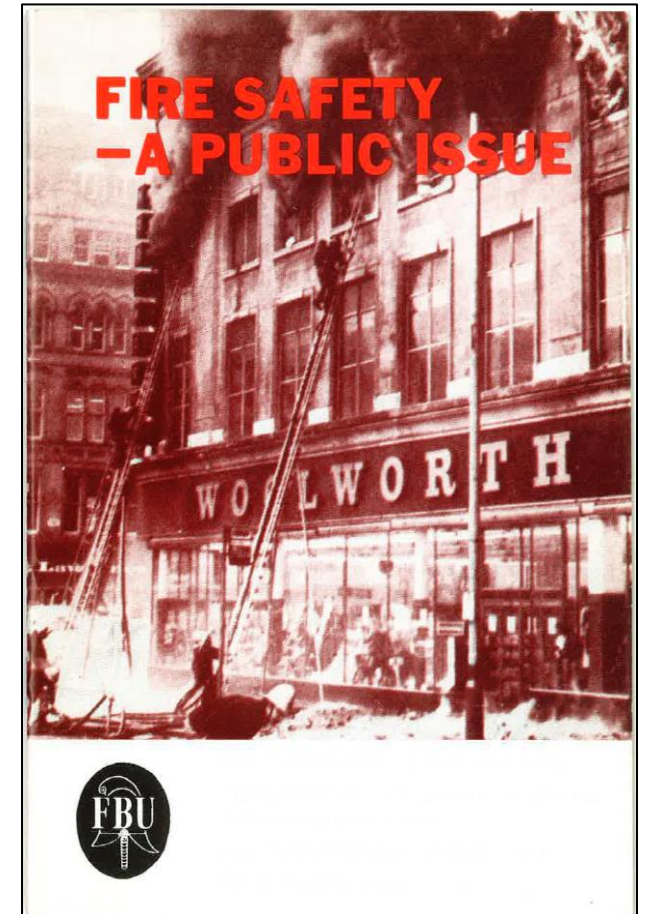
## Building Regulations 1985

- 300 pages of law reduced to 25 pages
- Approved Document B – weak voluntary guidance

“Private inspectors”

“Self-compliance”

*Deregulation – Cutting Red Tape (1994)*



# Labour governments (1997-2010)

## Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

- Abolition of the advisory council – CFBAC
- Scrapped national standards of fire cover
- Abolition of the inspectorate in England

## Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005

- Scrapped fire certificates
- Risk assessment by owners
- “Light touch” enforcement



# More Tory deregulation since 2010

- “Red Tape” challenge – cutting regulation
- Questioning of whether a National Framework was needed – then threadbare version
- Open Public Services – mutuals and privatisation
- Repeal of sections 20 and 21 of the Building Act concerning the exteriors for buildings
- “One-In, Two-Out rule” – more attacks on regulation



# FBU warnings: enforcement/oversight

“There needs to be clear and strong guidance on the enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005... to ensure the enforcement activities of fire & rescue authorities are properly carried out... We have significant concerns over the near-ending in some brigades of the fire certification regime...

“In its haste to rid itself of the national committee structure covered by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, the Ministry had little or no idea of what it would do to replace the functions that the CFBAC covered”.

*FBU Memorandum to the House of Commons ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, (2006)*

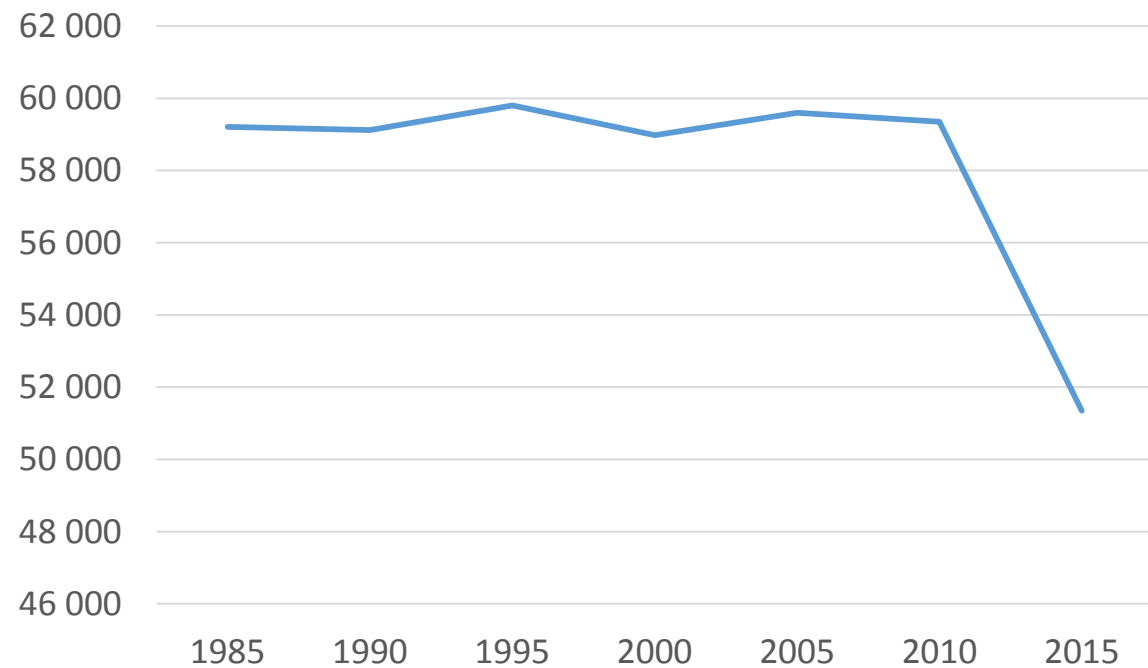


# Austerity – fire cuts since 2010

Between 2011 and 2015, over 30% of central funding was cut from fire and rescue services.

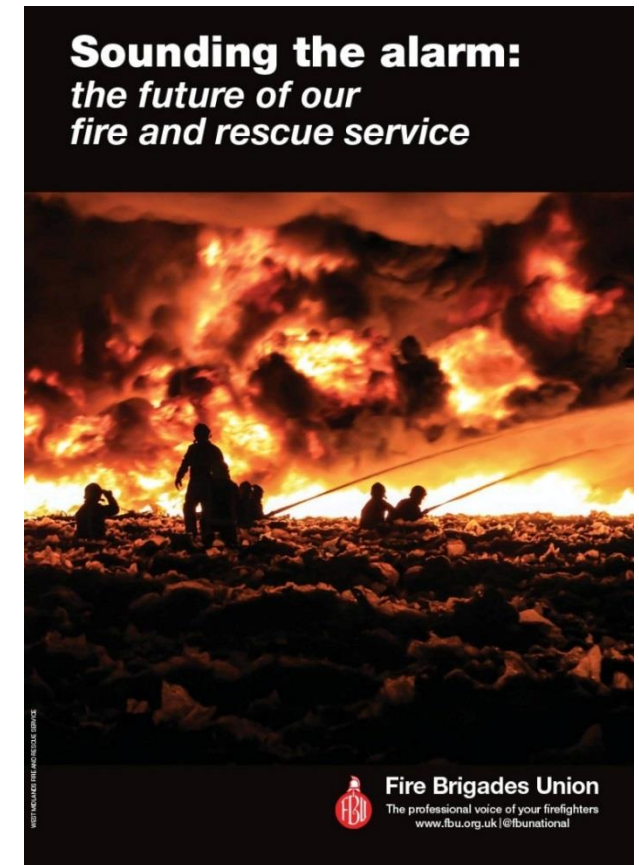
Planned central funding cut by 20% over the 2016-20 period.

Since 2010, **over 12,000** frontline firefighter jobs have been lost across the UK. This is a 20% of the entire workforce.



# FBU warnings: austerity

- It's About Time (2010)
- A Service to be Proud of – submission to the comprehensive spending review (2010)
- Don't Squeeze the Fire Service Dry (2012)
- Facing Reality – submission to the comprehensive spending review (2013)
- Sounding the Alarm (2014)
- FBU Submission to the comprehensive spending review (2015)
- *Fire and Rescue Service Matters* – bulletins for MPs



# Grenfell Tower Inquiry

## Phase 1: the events on the night

- Witness statements and testimony by firefighters
- Witness statements and testimony by the bereaved, survivors and residents
- Expert reports

## Phase 2: why and how the fire happened

- The council and building owners
- Construction firms
- Government ministers

