

Witness: M. Adamson

No:1

Exhibits: MA/1 – MA/3

Date: 15 July 2019

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHAEL JOHN ADAMSON

I, **MICHAEL JOHN ADAMSON**, of 44 Moorfields, London, EC2Y 9AL **WILL SAY** as follows:

1. I am the Chief Executive of the British Red Cross (the **BRC**). I make this witness statement in response to a Request for evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules issued by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (the **Inquiry**), which I received by way of letter dated 20 February 2019 (the **Rule 9 Request**).
2. The Rule 9 Request was addressed to me personally, as opposed to in my capacity as a representative of the BRC. I therefore make this witness statement in my personal capacity. The facts and matters addressed in this witness statement are based on my own knowledge except where indicated otherwise, and where facts and matters are based on information and belief I have identified the source of such information or belief.
3. I have exhibited a number of documents to this witness statement that I hope will prove to be of assistance to the Inquiry and its work. These documents are numbered sequentially in the order to which I refer to them throughout the statement, in the format **MA/[document number]**.

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The Structure of My Witness Statement

4. I have structured my witness statement in the following manner.
5. At **Section A**, I set out a summary of my professional background.
6. At **Section B**, I cover my role and responsibilities at the BRC.
7. I note that the Inquiry has asked me to consider specifically three issues relating to the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017 (the ***Grenfell Fire***) in my response to the Rule 9 Request. I understand that these are also set out at Issue 13 of the Inquiry's List of Issues, published on 4 June 2018.
8. The issues are as follows:
 1. *“13(a) What policies, procedures and plans were in place on the part of the Tenant Management Organisation, central and local government for dealing with a major emergency such as the Grenfell Tower fire?”*
 2. *“13(b) What was the response of the Tenant Management Organisation, central and local government by way of the provision of emergency relief in the days immediately following the fire?”*
 3. *“13(c) Was the response adequate and if not, in what respects was it inadequate?”*
9. In respect of issue 13(a), I have, given my position as the Chief Executive of the BRC, have a high level understanding of the policies, plans and procedures that were in place on the part of central and local government for dealing with a major emergency such as the Grenfell Fire. I also have an understanding of the BRC's internal policies, plans and procedures for responding to such an event.
10. However, there are a number of BRC members of staff who have very detailed knowledge of such policies, plans and procedures, as they deal with them on a day-to-day basis in the performance of their roles in the Crisis Response arm of the organisation. I am aware that a number of these individuals, who hold senior managerial positions in Crisis Response (namely; Norman McKinley (Executive Director of UK Operations), Colin Brown (UK Director of Independent Living and

Crisis Response), Simon Lewis (Head of Crisis Response) and Emma Spragg (London Director for Independent Living and Crisis Response)) have received (and responded to) Rule 9 Requests of their own. Although I have not seen any of these responses, I would expect, given the nature of their roles, that these individuals would have discussed these matters at length in the course of their evidence. To avoid unnecessary duplication, I therefore do not propose to do the same here. However, if the Inquiry would also like to hear from me in respect of these matters, I am very happy to provide a supplementary witness statement as necessary.

11. I am able to address issue 13(b) with the benefit of my personal and professional experience in having overall responsibility for the BRC response in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire, including assisting the Grenfell Fire Response Team (*GFRT*) which led the multi-agency pan-London response from Friday 16 June 2017 onwards. I set out my recollections in **Section C** of my witness statement.
12. I am also able to give assistance on issue 13(c) as a result of my experience of leading the BRC response in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire, and the work that has been done by the organisation subsequently in reflection of our response to the Grenfell Fire, the terror attacks on Manchester Arena on Monday 22 May 2017 (the *Manchester Attack*) and on London Bridge and Borough on Saturday 3 June 2017 (the *London Attacks*). My reflections are set out below at **Section D** of my witness statement.

A. Professional Background

13. I took up my role as Chief Executive of the BRC in November 2014. I therefore was in this position at the time of the Grenfell Fire. Prior to becoming Chief Executive, I was the Managing Director of Operations from October 2010 to October 2014.
14. Before joining the BRC, I was the Managing Director of the Services Group at Action on Hearing Loss, a charitable organisation working on behalf of the UK's 9 million people who are deaf or have hearing loss, from 2005 to 2010.
15. Between March 2003 to September 2005, I was Director of Commissioning for the Cotswold & Vale Primary Care Trust. From 1993 to 2003, I held the positions of Director of Strategy, Planning and Information Systems at the BRC, Regional Director for the London and South-East Region and the Head of International Development.

16. Since 1 November 2014, I have been a trustee of the Disasters Emergency Committee, which brings together 14 leading UK aid agencies (including the BRC) to raise money at times of humanitarian crisis overseas. I am also a trustee of Catch22, a social business that works at every stage of the social welfare cycle to build resilience and aspiration in people and communities, having been appointed on 29 September 2017. And I have recently been appointed a trustee of the newly-established National Emergencies Trust.
17. In addition, I am presently a member of the NHS Long-term Plan Prevention Board, which brings together patient groups, clinicians and independent experts to help create a collective view of how to enable people to live well for longer (and I have been so since 2015). I am also a member of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for the UK (the *Foreign Secretary*) Human Rights Advisory Panel, which works to provide the Foreign Secretary with advice about approaches to the protection of human rights around the world in order to inform foreign policy, a role which I have held since I was appointed Chief Executive of the BRC.
18. I also was previously a trustee of the Nelson Trust, an organisation that specialises in assisting those who struggle with addiction, from November 2004 to October 2016.
19. I was awarded an MBA with distinction from Kingston University in 1999, a Master in Philosophy from the University of Oxford in 1984, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Sheffield University in 1982.

B. The BRC and my Role within the BRC

20. In order fully to understand the BRC's response to the Grenfell Fire, I think it important first to set out, in summary, a brief history of the BRC and its core values and aims.

Historical background

21. The BRC was founded in 1870, and was known initially as the British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War, before being renamed the British Red Cross in 1905. In 1907, in order to fulfil its then wartime role, the BRC adopted a permanent structure of local branches and extended its presence to communities around the UK. It was granted its first Royal Charter in 1908, which was in large part supplemented and

replaced by a further Royal Charter made by an Order in Council on 1 January 1988 and revised in July 2003 (collectively, the *Charter*). A copy of the Charter is exhibited at **MA/1**. The Charter provides for the BRC to have corporate status, recognises its charitable status and establishes its governance regime.

22. The BRC today is governed by a board of trustees, managed by an executive leadership team (*ELT*) and is assisted in its humanitarian work by over 18,000 volunteers and 4,000 members of staff. The trustees are responsible for ensuring that the BRC is effective in achieving its objectives and using its resources to maximum effect, whilst upholding the BRC's core ethos and values. ELT, of which I, as Chief Executive, am a member, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the BRC.
23. The legal objects of the BRC, as provided for in the Charter, are to provide assistance to victims of armed conflicts, to work for the improvement of health and the prevention of disease and for the prevention and alleviation of human suffering in the UK and worldwide. We are obliged to (and do) act in accordance with seven 'Fundamental Principles' as established by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, namely: humanity; impartiality; neutrality; independence; voluntary service; unity and universality. We consider that it is important that these principles allow the people we help to recognise that the BRC is a neutral, independent and impartial body.
24. The BRC does also have a special status which means that it neither forms part of government nor comprises a non-government organisation (which differs from many other charitable bodies active within the voluntary sector). This is its 'auxiliary' or support, function to the UK's public authorities in the humanitarian field. The Charter provides that the BRC is recognised by central government as a voluntary aid society, with an auxiliary function to the public authorities (and particularly to the medical services of the armed forces). This recognition establishes an automatic relationship between the BRC and the government (such that the BRC is required to have regard to the considerations of the government, without being beholden to it, while carrying out its primary responsibility to alleviate suffering in emergencies).
25. We are aware of the complexity of the interplay between our auxiliary status and the fundamental principle of independence. However, successive governments have

acknowledged, and we strongly believe, that the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality provide the best means by which to gain the confidence of those in need in order to carry out our objects. Further guidance on the BRC's auxiliary role is provided in a publication titled '[t]he British Red Cross's humanitarian auxiliary role to the UK government and armed forces' which is exhibited at **MA/2** to my witness statement.

My role

26. In essence, my role as Chief Executive of the BRC is to ensure that in, carrying out its operations, the BRC both has a clear sense of purpose, and the wherewithal to fulfil that purpose.
27. On a daily basis, this entails meeting with key individuals within and outside of the organisation to progress its strategy, and to tackle issues that arise in the ongoing work of the organisation through a combination of one-to-one and team meetings. In particular, I hold one-to-one meetings with each of the Executive Directors on a six-weekly basis. Each member of ELT reports directly into me. I work closely with the board of trustees which, as discussed in more detail at paragraph 22 above, governs the BRC and is the highest decision-making body, with overall legal responsibility for the organisation.
28. When a crisis occurs outside of the UK, my day-to-day role and responsibilities do not alter significantly. Where appropriate, the BRC will launch a fundraising appeal so that those within the UK are able to make donations so as to assist those affected by that crisis. Once the decision to launch such an appeal is made (by the Executive Directors of International, of Fundraising and of Communications & Advocacy) the internal procedures and policies that the BRC has in place are followed by those who report into me and the internal processes run smoothly without any intervention or detailed oversight from myself.
29. Recent international crises for which the BRC has launched fundraising appeals include: the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the consequences of the escalation of violence in Myanmar; the conflict in South Sudan; the severe flooding

caused by Cyclone Idai in Mozambique; and the humanitarian crisis across Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad arising from conflict, food shortages and disease.

30. When these emergencies occur, such as the recent Cyclone Idai affecting Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March 2019, we will also mobilise other capabilities such as specialist staff and emergency response units to tackle particular issues on the ground. From time to time, I will then visit countries where emergencies have taken place to take stock of the impact we are having and the challenges that still lie ahead. For example, in the last 18 months I have visited Syria and Bangladesh to review our work there.
31. The BRC also responds to smaller scale crises and emergencies throughout the UK. Such an incident does not have to be particularly serious for the BRC to assist with an emergency response by the local authorities and emergency services. The BRC may help, for instance, if people need to be evacuated from their homes due to a gas leak, or if there has been flooding following a recent storm. The BRC will respond by following well established internal policies, procedures and plans that are set out in the organisation's emergency response handbook (the *Handbook*). A copy of the Handbook is exhibited at **MA/3** to my witness statement.
32. Mr McKinley, as the Executive Director of UK Operations, has overall responsibility and accountability for the BRC's operational response to UK emergencies and crises. Mr McKinley, as a member of ELT, reports directly into me. He is supported in that regard by Mr Brown, as UK Director for Independent Living and Crisis Response, who reports into him. In turn, Mr Brown is assisted by Mr Lewis, as UK Head of Crisis Response, and a number of regional "Area Directors" who have responsibility for Independent Living and Crisis Response across eight geographical regions in the UK and Northern Ireland. Most relevantly, Ms Spragg is the London Director for Independent Living and Crisis Response, and was in that role at the time of the Grenfell Fire.
33. I have great confidence in the BRC members of staff who are responsible for leading the BRC's response to crises in the UK and therefore do not typically become involved in the response to these types of incidents (which, it is worth noting, occur on a very frequent, almost daily, basis).

34. By contrast, I would become involved with the BRC's response to an emergency or crisis if that incident is particularly serious, complex and high profile. How involved I am with a particular response tends to differ on a case-by-case basis and is somewhat subjective. By way of illustration, I was significantly involved with the BRC's responses to the Grenfell Fire, the terror attacks that took place at London Bridge and in Borough on Saturday 3 June 2017 (the *London Attacks*) and the terror attack on Manchester Arena following a concert by the American singer Ariana Grande on Monday 22 May 2017 (the *Manchester Attack*). In contrast, I had less direct involvement with the BRC responses to the terror attack on Westminster that occurred on Wednesday 22 March 2017 and outside the Finsbury Park Mosque on Monday 19 June 2017.
35. When the BRC is responding to a particularly serious crisis, my engagement with certain members of ELT becomes more pronounced. These individuals are Mr McKinley, Zoë Abrams (the Executive Director of Communications & Advocacy) and, historically, Mark Astarita (who was the Executive Director of Fundraising from August 2003 to October 2017, and was accordingly in this role at the time of the Grenfell Fire).

C. My Recollections of Assisting with the Response to the Grenfell Fire

My initial awareness of the Grenfell Fire

36. I believe that I first heard about the Grenfell Fire early in the morning of Wednesday 17 June 2017. I do not recall the precise circumstances in which I became aware of the fire, but I believe it to have been in a personal capacity first through national media and before I checked my work emails.
37. I am on the distribution list for "Operational Updates", which are sent by email by members of Mr Lewis' team at regular intervals throughout the day, with the frequency of those emails becoming greater when the BRC is responding to major incidents. As such, I believe I was informed by one of these Operational Updates that the BRC had deployed in response to having been asked by RBKC to assist primarily with the setting up and running of a rest centre (which opened, towards the end of that day, at the

Westway Sports and Leisure Centre near the scene of the fire (the *Westway*)).¹ I do not now recall the contents of any specific Operational Update, but I am likely to have been updated as to the BRC's response in the immediate aftermath of the fire by those means.

38. During the course of Wednesday 14 June, the information flow as to the extent and seriousness of the Grenfell Fire was initially unclear. Towards the end of the day the gravity of the situation in terms of how many people were likely to have died, been injured or otherwise been affected had become clearer, but there was still a lot of confusion as to the details of what had happened.

Consideration of whether to launch a fundraising appeal

39. I recall that, when I reached the office that morning, my main consideration (which continued throughout that day) was whether the BRC should be launching a fundraising appeal and whether our response was adequate. This should be seen against the context of the BRC having very recently launched a fundraising appeal, jointly with Manchester City Council, for those who had been affected by the Manchester Attack (known as the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund). The launch of this fund marked the first time that the BRC had launched an appeal in relation to a UK crisis since the terror attacks on the London transport network that had occurred on 7 July 2005 (the *London Bombings*).
40. In the aftermath of the Manchester Attack, the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund received a significant number of donations from the public due to the fact that the attack had taken place as concertgoers were leaving the arena following a concert by the American singer Ariana Grande. In addition, Ms Grande, together with her manager, Scooter Braun, the BRC and a number of others, had organised a benefit concert and television special known as "One Love Manchester" that was held at the Old Trafford Cricket Ground on Saturday 4 June 2017. Proceeds raised from the event went to the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund.

¹ The Westway was transformed at the end of the weekend of 17 and 18 June 2017 into a "humanitarian assistance centre" (*HAC*). The purpose of HACs are to provide a place where individuals can continue to go for support, information and assistance once their immediate basic needs have been met by the rest centre. Rest centres typically operate for only 24 to 48 hours in the aftermath of a major incident, but the one at the Westway was run for longer as there was a delay in providing a few of those affected with appropriate temporary accommodation.

41. Shortly after the Manchester Attack, the BRC also launched a fundraising appeal in the aftermath of the London Attacks, known as the UK Solidarity Fund. The purpose of the fund as announced – which still exists to date – was to assist those who are affected by terror attacks in the UK. Given its purpose, it was not possible to use donations to the UK Solidarity Fund to help those affected by the Grenfell Fire.
42. Accordingly, there were two potential ways we could find funding to help those individuals. We could make a donation from the BRC Disaster Fund, which is a longstanding (and permanent) fund that receives non-earmarked donations from members of the public and commercial organisations. Additionally, we could set up a specific fundraising appeal in order to support those who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire.
43. In this case, in the initial phase, we mobilised our own people immediately in accordance with plans prepared by the London Resilience Partnership (the *Partnership*), which I discuss further at paragraph 119 below, and 36 hours later decided to launch a public appeal. This decision reflected the gravity of the emergency and the scale of need arising and the ability of our fundraising team to raise enough to make a significant difference.
44. Notwithstanding that consideration, the decision as to whether to launch a fundraising appeal was not quite as clear cut in the initial aftermath of the Grenfell Fire as one might expect. As I mention at paragraph 38 above, information about the extent of the incident was still a little unclear. In addition, as I note at paragraph 39 above, the BRC had not needed to launch a fundraising appeal to deal with a UK major incident or emergency since the London Bombings, so these were not a frequent occurrence.
45. The difficulty in determining whether to launch a fundraising appeal in a UK context arises from the nature of incidents that typically occur in a financially and politically stable, developed country. A number of people may be, unfortunately and sadly, affected by a terror attack, or their house may suffer from flood damage if a nearby river bursts its banks due to heavy rains. However, in those incidents, while deeply upsetting for those involved, and, often, for the country as a whole, it is usually relatively straightforward to determine the needs of those affected, and how those needs may be met. For example, people whose houses have suffered flood damage may need

temporary accommodation and help with their houses drying out, while those affected by terror attacks may need medical attention and psychosocial support as a priority.

46. It is important to remember that the purpose of cash distributions out of fundraising appeals is not to “compensate” those affected for their losses, whether of a relative, the suffering of potentially life-changing injuries, or of material possessions. Instead, the distributions are intended to assist those affected (or the close relatives of the deceased) with getting through the immediate difficult period following the incident, such as having to take time off work to grieve or to recover physically and mentally, giving up a job, or where the family breadwinner has died in, or as a result of, the incident. Sometimes, it is not immediately clear what those needs will be, and how much needs to be raised to assist with those needs.
47. The level of support to be provided by the local and central governments was also not particularly clear at such an early juncture (perhaps understandably, for the same reasons of difficulty in the identification of needs to be met). As an example, with the Grenfell Fire, and at the time we were considering whether to launch a fundraising appeal, the number of people affected and in what way was not immediately apparent, whether all of the flats had been destroyed beyond repair, or whether it would have been possible to collect belongings. It was also not clear whether those affected may have been able to rely on home insurance to replace what they had lost and to repair their homes.
48. This is in contrast to humanitarian disasters that happen on an international scale, in countries and areas with a poorly developed infrastructure to cope with natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis, civil unrest, disease or famine. Given that the scale of unmet need in those situations is often so large that it is almost impossible to raise enough money to meet those needs, there is never really any question as to whether launching a fundraising appeal is the right thing to do.
49. During the morning of Wednesday 14 June 2017, I recall having a discussion with Mr Astarita to work through these competing factors. We debated whether we knew enough yet to launch an appeal and then agreed that the key personnel from UK Operations, Fundraising and the Communications & Advocacy Directorates should convene to consider the issues.

50. When a decision needs to be reached as to whether to launch a fundraising appeal, this is initially considered by a team known as the Society Action Team (the *SAT*). The SAT is formed of Mr Lewis, Paul Marvell, the then Head of Fundraising Strategy (who at that time reported into the Executive Director of Fundraising, i.e., at the time of the Grenfell Fire, Mr Astarita), members of Mr Lewis' Crisis Response team and members of the Fundraising and Communications Directorates.
51. The SAT makes a recommendation as to whether an appeal ought to be launched to Ms Abrams, Mr McKinley and Mr Astarita. Those three members of ELT then (following discussions led by Mr Astarita) decide whether there is a clearly identifiable need to launch a fundraising appeal, and, if so, how that appeal ought to be set up and promoted. This is a delegated authority and I am informed of the decision taken by the three Executive Directors. That said, in the event that I felt that the wrong decision had been reached, I would ask the team to reconsider its decision, or ultimately I would overrule a decision if I deemed that approach to be necessary.
52. I was content to wait until the SAT had made its recommendation to Mr Astarita and the other responsible Executive Directors, and for them in turn to weigh up all of the factors and to decide whether or not an appeal should be launched. However, at this point, I was leaning towards the view that a fundraising appeal ought to be launched by the BRC.
53. However, by the end of Wednesday evening, I had still not heard from Mr Astarita, Ms Abrams and Mr McKinley as to whether they had reached a joint decision.
54. In the morning of the next day, Thursday 15 June 2017, I met with members of ELT for our monthly meeting (which had been scheduled to fall on that day purely by chance). When arranged, the purpose of this meeting (as is typical in these monthly meetings) was to discuss ongoing matters relating to the running of the organisation. However, I took the decision to suspend those discussions so that we were able to focus on our response to the Grenfell Fire.
55. I started the meeting by asking Mr Astarita, Ms Abrams and Mr McKinley where they had come out on the fundraising appeal decision. They informed me that they had not yet reached a definitive decision at this point.

56. In my view, we really could not wait any longer to launch an appeal if we were going to do so. We therefore needed to come to a final decision either way as soon as possible. In order to achieve this, I adjourned the ELT meeting so as to enable Mr Astarita, Mr McKinley and Ms Abrams to meet to discuss the issue.
57. Mr Astarita, Ms Abrams and Mr McKinley returned a short while later and announced that, in line with the recommendation of the SAT, they had decided that the BRC should launch a fundraising appeal. I agreed with this decision. Mr Astarita, Ms Abrams and Mr McKinley, with support from their respective teams, then worked late into the evening to set up the appeal. It was then launched the next morning, on Friday 16 June 2017, with donations going into the newly created London Fire Relief Fund.

My dialogue with the Chief Executive of RBKC

58. In the hours immediately following the Grenfell Fire, it became increasingly clear to the BRC and others that RBKC was struggling in its efforts to organise the response to the fire. There was a lot to be done, the confirmed death toll was rising and it was becoming more evident how seriously affected the community had been. The wider needs of those affected were also becoming more apparent, but, with it, also the capacity of the RBKC response, as it was being run, to coordinate how those needs were met.
59. Equally, there was a lot of distress and anger among those who had been directly affected, but also within the wider community and the general public at large. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Grenfell Tower is situated in one of the most affluent boroughs in the country, with a number of extremely wealthy residents living in close proximity to those living in the Grenfell Tower who were not so well off. In light of these factors, the press and political coverage was significant, and largely critical in tone and substance.
60. As a humanitarian organisation, the primary aim of the BRC is always to help those in need. It was becoming clear that the RBKC response, as it was, was not doing that to the extent that it needed to do so.
61. As I mention at paragraph 37 above, the BRC had deployed to assist RBKC, at its request, in its response to the Grenfell Fire in the very early hours of Wednesday 14

June 2017. A representative of RBKC had contacted a member of Mr Lewis' central Crisis Response team in order to request the BRC's assistance, under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (*MoU*) between the BRC and the council. I have not seen a copy of this document, nor have I had any reason to do so.

62. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, there are MoUs in place between the BRC and most local authorities throughout the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. These MoUs set out the way in which the BRC will assist that local authority with an emergency response (among other things).
63. However, at the time of the Grenfell Fire, the BRC would not "self-deploy" under the terms of the MoU (or otherwise) in the event the organisation became aware of a major incident or emergency happening within that local authority's remit. Instead, the BRC would act only when asked to do so by the local authority or the coordinating emergency service such as the police (which, in practice, would almost always happen), and our volunteers would deploy to the scene of the incident will assist in ways they had been asked to do so by the local authority.² This reflects our status as an auxiliary to government, which I describe at paragraphs 24 and 25 above. As I state at paragraph 37 above, the BRC had been asked by RBKC primarily to assist in the setting up and running of the Westway.
64. We had decided at the ELT meeting that took place on Thursday 15 June 2017 that I should proactively get in touch with the then Chief Executive of RBKC, Nicholas Holgate, to obtain an update on the relief effort and to discuss additional ways in which the BRC could potentially provide further assistance with the response.
65. This was the first time I had spoken with Mr Holgate. I did not find the fact that he had not yet contacted me to be particularly unusual. In my experience, local authorities usually do ask for and welcome help from the voluntary sector when they need it, but the level of senior strategic engagement when responding to a major incident or an emergency varies according to scale and need.

² Having reflected as an organisation in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire and the other events of the summer of 2017, we now are of the view that it may, in certain circumstances, be necessary for the BRC to self-deploy proactively where it feels to do so would serve a clearly unmet humanitarian need, even when not expressly asked to assist by a local authority. I discuss this matter further at paragraphs 135 to 142 below.

66. When I first called Mr Holgate, he was unavailable to speak. However, he returned my call very quickly.
67. On the phone call, I made a number of offers to Mr Holgate of ways in which the BRC could further assist RBKC's response to the Grenfell Fire. These included: providing practical and emotional support; access to large tents to use outside of the Westway as reception areas; assistance with cash distribution in the form of small amounts of money to be given to those who had been affected to buy food and personal items; and help with coordinating the fundraising efforts and launching an appeal (which, as I note at paragraph 57 above, we had decided to do in any event, but we typically launch any such appeal with the support of the relevant local authority).
68. I recall that while Mr Holgate appeared to be positive and polite on the call, he did not wish to take up most of the BRC's offers of additional assistance. He told me that RBKC had the cash distribution process covered. However, I subsequently became aware that, although the council had attempted to distribute cash, the manner in which it had done so was haphazard, and had been conducted by a number of different officials and different local actors. This made it impossible to track who received what. This was in large part because, for the first few days following the Grenfell Fire, there had been no effective registration by RBKC of anyone who had been affected (with the process ultimately taking close to one week to be coherently organised). While the situation was undoubtedly difficult and confusing, the importance of this between the different statutory actors was not recognised sufficiently early.
69. By way of context, the establishment of an effective and accurate registration process is one of the first tasks prioritised by those responding to emergencies that have occurred internationally. The failure to set up a registration process promptly in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire meant that cash distribution to those in need could not be done in an effective and complete manner.
70. Mr Holgate expressed gratitude for the support in establishing the rest centre at the Westway and accepted my proposal for the BRC to launch its own fundraising appeal. My phone call with Mr Holgate concluded with his agreeing to be in touch if he felt that the BRC could assist further in any way with the RBKC response.

Other connections

71. Around that time. I also reached out to some of the leaders of local voluntary organisations, such as the Kensington and Chelsea Foundation. This was part of an attempt to connect the BRC into some of the wider response. These initial contacts proved useful later on in the response.

Set up of the GFRT

72. However, I did not hear from Mr Holgate, or from any person in a senior leadership role within RBKC again. I note that during the following day, Friday 16 June 2017 (which was the day that I first visited the Grenfell Tower/ Westway, in the morning), I learned from senior colleagues that RBKC had been relieved of the responsibility for coordinating the response to the Grenfell Fire by the London Resilience Forum (*LRF*), which is the multi-agency partnership that ensures London's preparedness in the event of emergencies (of which the BRC is part).
73. I also became aware that John Barradell, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive of the Corporation of the City of London, had been tasked with leading the GFRT, which, as I note at paragraph 11 above, was in the process of being set up to take over the running of the response to the Grenfell Fire from RBKC. I was keen to understand from Mr Barradell how best the BRC could assist the GFRT with the coordination of the response.
74. Mr Barradell and I spoke at around 8:00pm or 9:00pm later that evening. Mr Barradell explained to me that the GFRT would work from offices in Westminster, and invited me to attend meetings during the course of the weekend. At this time, we did not discuss the nature of the further support required.

My time at the GFRT on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 June 2017

75. I attended the GFRT offices on Saturday 17 June and Sunday 18 June 2017, staying until approximately 10:00pm both nights. When I arrived I found that members of our Communications team were already established supporting the communications and

social media efforts of the GFRT. Martin Halliwell, our Chief Finance Officer, was also in attendance to provide support.

76. I found the position at the GFRT over that weekend still to be somewhat confused, and it was difficult for me to form an objective analysis of the situation. I understood that, on the Saturday, the Chief Executives of various local London local authorities that were part of the LRF were convened in order to be allocated various aspects of the response work. I spent a large proportion of my time during the weekend talking to people, including Mr Barradell, in order to ascertain how the BRC could best assist with the response. He confirmed that they were seeking support from us with the GFRT's communications strategy, as well as the ongoing support in the rest centre at the Westway and with the establishment of a support line.
77. I recall a number of Chief Executives sitting down in a room with their own handwritten tables, trying to establish lists of who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire, who had been bereaved, who had been made homeless, where people were being housed in temporary accommodation, what their needs were and whether (and if so, how) those needs were being met. There was not a clear picture. As I note above at paragraph 69, registration of those affected is a critical first step in emergency response. It was therefore not ideal that the process remained ongoing (and without a clear methodology) more than three days after the fire had started. It would appear that RBKC had not been able to pass such information to GFRT.
78. Over the course of the weekend, I made contact with the Chair of the London Emergency Trust (the *LET*), Gerald Oppenheim, to request that the LET be the distribution partner for the funds that the BRC raised. We had a long-standing partnership with them and had worked with them in response to the London Attacks. Mr Oppenheim agreed to contact his trustees to seek approval of the LET's involvement in this regard and during the course of Sunday 18 June confirmed that the LET would play this role.
79. It was also decided to implement a rota system of those in senior leadership positions in the various London local authorities that were assisting with the GFRT response, to run the rest centre and to serve as the operational lead at the scene of the Grenfell Fire.

Despite the challenges with registration, there was an overall improvement in the response once the GFRT took it over from RBKC.

80. I also was informed Mr Barradell that the GFRT was intending to release a press statement in which the fact that the BRC was assisting with the GFRT response would be referenced and that I should be a joint spokesperson for this. I recall having discussions with a variety of people to ensure that I was sufficiently briefed and aware of the intended plans of the GFRT going forward (and the BRC's role in such plans) so that I could be comfortable with the BRC's name being used in this way in relation to the response.
81. On Sunday 18 June 2017 I did a joint broadcast with the Chief Executive of Southwark Council, Eleanor Kelly. We made clear that the initial response had not been good enough, and that the newly established GFRT was now leading the response effort. In particular, we stressed that GFRT's main focus was on housing for those affected, and spoke about the financial and other support services that were available.

The BRC's subsequent involvement with the GFRT response

82. From Monday 19 June 2017 I stepped back from being present physically at the GFRT offices in Westminster. Mr McKinley instead attended in my place.
83. However, I remained part of daily meetings at the BRC headquarters in Moorgate with relevant members of ELT (namely, Mr McKinley, Mr Astarita and Ms Abrams) and other key staff which occurred at approximately 9:00am or 10:00am each day
84. The purpose of these meetings was primarily to discuss the role the BRC was playing in the multi-agency response effort that was being led by the GFRT and to take stock of the various issues that the organisation was tasked with addressing. These meetings took place each day for a number of weeks. Although ELT and I were obviously mindful of the political context to the response, our focus was entirely on doing what we needed to be doing so that we could be as effective as we could.
85. Once the GFRT had taken over the response to the Grenfell Fire, the BRC steadily got into a pattern of doing what needed to be done from our end as part of that response. This allowed me to take a step back from the response, and to leave it in the hands of

the relevant staff. I still retained a level of oversight at the same time as dealing with my day-to-day responsibilities.

86. Our involvement in the GFRT response required members of ELT, and, specifically Ms Abrams and Mr McKinley, to make high profile connections with those in equivalent positions of senior leadership that were also involved in the response.
87. We assisted with the response in four main further ways once the GFRT had been set up. First, we were asked by the GFRT to assist in the set-up of the Family and Friends Assistance Centre (*FFAC*) in Holborn, which opened on or around Tuesday 20 June 2017. FFACs are set up following major incidents in which people have died. They are situated away from the scene of the incident for privacy and confidentiality purposes, and offer a safe space for friends and family of the deceased to receive information, support and sometimes to provide forensic evidence for identification purposes. We provided a team of trained psychosocial support volunteers from our Psychosocial Support Team to support the families affected and ensure a supportive, caring environment.
88. Second, we assisted those who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire with their efforts to trace family members living abroad and assisted those who were arriving from abroad to support those in their families who had been bereaved or otherwise affected by the fire.
89. Third, and as I discuss in further detail at paragraph 109 below, we made the case to the government that neither the immigration nor benefit status of any residents of the Grenfell Tower should be a factor in consideration of the humanitarian support that they were entitled to receive to meet their needs. The government agreed that entitlement to benefits should not be affected by access to humanitarian funding and that any issues with immigration status should be suspended for one year.
90. Fourth, in the days following the Grenfell Fire, the Westway became inundated with physical donations from the public. These were becoming stacked up in piles in no real coherent order, and RBKC were finding it difficult to sort through these and distribute. Soon, as much as 200 tonnes of donated goods had accumulated. The BRC was asked by RBKC to help RBKC with this task, and I decided that if we had the capacity to assist then we should. The BRC took the lead on this.

91. The BRC London Retail Area Manager, Bernadette Considine, took on the responsibility for sorting through the goods helped by a team of volunteers. These were eventually moved offsite to the Royal Mail Winter Sorting Office in Greenford, so as to allow the Westway to serve better as a HAC to aid those who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire. At the sorting office, donations that were brand new were returned immediately to the Westway for distribution to those in need.
92. Donations that were of a good enough quality or utility either to be used or sold were sent to various BRC retail stores, and then sold under “Shop for Grenfell” branding. The proceeds from the sale of any such goods went back into the London Fire Relief Fund. This effectively caused an interruption to the BRC’s general operations, as we gave over shop space to display these items rather than those which had been donated to the BRC directly, for the benefit of the BRC. Nevertheless, we were happy to do it, as it was such a critical humanitarian cause.
93. Items that were of insufficient quality or utility either to be used or sold were disposed of. Unfortunately, there arose a misconception that the BRC was somehow “stealing” these public donations, which had been intended to help those affected by the fire, for the organisation’s own purposes, or to benefit BRC work in other areas. This led to a lot of negative commentary on social media and, while we were at pains to try to correct this misunderstanding, unfortunately it continued to prevail for quite some time.

My visits to the scene of the Grenfell Fire

94. I also attended the scene of the Grenfell Fire on a number of occasions in the weeks that followed the fire, and subsequently. As I note at paragraph 72 above, my first visit was on the morning of Friday 16 June 2017. I then made a number of further visits to see how the response was progressing, but also personally to thank the BRC volunteers who were on the ground and working tirelessly in what were some very difficult and traumatic circumstances. Attending the scene of the fire allowed me to take a view on what aspects of the response were working well (both from a GFRT and BRC-specific perspective) and, also, and perhaps even more importantly, what was working less well.
95. I use the benefit of those experiences, together with what I understood from others within the organisation, and what we have learned together having subsequently reflected on the response in the weeks, months, and now, years following the Grenfell

Fire, to set out my thoughts on the adequacy of the response to the fire primarily at **Section D** of my witness statement below. Nevertheless, where it makes the most sense to do so, I consider what could have been done better in the remainder of this section below (although I also summarise these points as necessary in the consideration of my response at **Section D** for the sake of convenience).

96. My overarching recollection of my visits to the scene of the Grenfell Fire was that the scene was very chaotic. That was, in part, due to the very unique set of circumstances of the fire and the degree of trauma experienced. Furthermore, the profile of the communities affected by the fire was very diverse (for example, English was a second language for some) and we were concerned that others may be wary of dealing with the authorities or police, perhaps due to previous experiences or issues with their immigration status.

Issues with the registration process

97. As such, and as I mention at paragraph 77 above, neither RBKC nor the GFRT knew who had been affected by the fire for too long a period of time. I believe this issue was further complicated by concerns over data protection issues that had arisen, which made it difficult for the police and other agencies to share the information that they did have with the GFRT for fear of breaching the relevant laws or regulations. Notwithstanding these practical issues, the registration and data sharing process should be improved for the future.
98. Without a coherent registration process, it was difficult to identify who had been affected, their needs, and how best to address those needs. It was also sometimes not clear where those who had been affected actually were. Many people were being housed in temporary accommodation, but it was sometimes difficult to work out where they were so they could be checked on and offered further support.
99. The issues with the registration process lingered until around Tuesday 20 to Thursday 22 June 2017. This also made it difficult for the LET to ascertain to whom the funds that had been raised from the BRC fundraising appeal ought to be distributed, in a situation where many of those who had been affected were in dire need of immediate financial assistance.

Reluctance or unwillingness to access the Westway

100. In addition, the Westway was situated behind a police cordon, which was intended to keep people safe and the large media presence at bay. A number of those uncomfortable with the police and local authorities did not wish to cross the cordon to access the Westway, instead choosing to rely on pop-up centres that had been set up by churches, mosques, community organisations and charities in the local community. The diversity in support from such a large cross-section of the local community was remarkable but, to a certain extent, uncoordinated. It was not easy to work out who had been affected, particularly in absence of an efficient and comprehensive registration process, and those who were just there to help.
101. The outpouring of empathy and support demonstrated to me the true power of communities to provide support when others are in need. However, it also illustrated to me two things. First, both the BRC and those in charge of the response (whether RBKC or the GFRT) should have realised at an earlier point that some of those affected were not accessing the Westway because they did not feel comfortable there. Although we sent community outreach teams from the week commencing 19 June 2017 out on the streets and to the locations where people were congregating, with hindsight it would have been better to have done this sooner to see how we could help and what was needed. We could then have made earlier decision about how best to use our resources.
102. Second, we needed to consider *why* those who were not accessing the Westway felt uncomfortable there, whether it was due to the heavy media and police presence, uncertainty as to who was in charge of running the Westway (perhaps related to suspicion of the authorities), or a lack of understanding of the diverse needs of those affected.
103. In my view, not enough thought or consideration was given to these factors by those who were leading the multi-agency response or, indeed by the BRC, in the early days. We have reflected on these issues, and I discuss the ways in which we are trying to do so further at paragraphs 137 to 156 below.

Donation of goods

104. Further adding to the sense of chaos and confusion was the sheer volume of donations of goods that were received from members of the public and commercial organisations, either in lieu of or in addition to cash donations to the fundraising appeals that had been set up (including the BRC's own). These donated goods were initially stacked up in piles on the tennis courts at the Westway site.
105. As I note at paragraph 90 above, a lot of time and resource was spent by the BRC volunteers and others assisting with the response attempting to sort through those donations, with much of what had been donated not being of sufficient quality or utility for immediate distribution. It would have been much more valuable for the BRC volunteers to have spent their time supporting those who had been affected, whether at the Westway or as part of the community outreach teams. If people had given cash instead of goods, we could have provided this to those affected, giving them dignity and choice about the assistance which they required. I discuss this issue in further detail at paragraph 156 below.

D. Adequacy of response

106. The early summer of 2017 represented one of the most challenging periods for the BRC since I joined the organisation. The combination of the Manchester Attack and the London Attacks and the Grenfell Fire tested our resources and preparedness. For our part, since the summer of 2017, I and ELT have led the efforts of the BRC to scrutinise thoroughly and to review critically our part in the response to the Grenfell Fire, and really to think about what we (and other emergency responders) should do differently. I set out my thoughts below, in respect of the central and local government response to the Grenfell Fire, how the various responders worked together in assisting with that response, and the BRC's own involvement as part in the effort led initially by RBKC and then by GFRT.

The Central Government Response

107. In my view, it is vital that any potential issues concerning an individual's legal status should not preclude (or have the perception that it precludes or inhibits) his/her ability to access humanitarian relief following a major incident or an emergency. I think that there are two key areas where this might be the case (and which were relevant in the context of Grenfell Fire). These are: (i) an individual's immigration status; and (ii) the

impact the humanitarian cash distributions may have on his or her ability to obtain benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (*DWP*).

Immigration Status

108. First, it is now apparent that a number of those affected by the Grenfell Fire did not feel comfortable accessing the Westway, or approaching those they associated with the “establishment” (including employees of RBKC, those assisting with the GFRT effort, the emergency services and, as I discuss at paragraph 112 below, the BRC itself), for fear of drawing attention to their (or members of their family’s) immigration status, and potentially compromising the manner in which they were able to live (for instance, if they were working in circumstances in which their visa arrangements precluded them from seeking paid employment in the UK).
109. In order to avoid this problem arising, a clear prompt and publicly accessible message needs to be given in unequivocal terms by central government that immigration status will not be a factor in the ability to access support.
110. In light of this, in late June 2017 the BRC asked the government to effect and to announce an amnesty for a two year period from an assessment of the immigration status of those who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire, so that they felt able to seek out the support they needed from the authorities. The government ultimately granted an amnesty along these lines (as discussed at paragraph 89 above), albeit for only a one year period.³
111. While welcome, a two year period would have been preferable to allow those affected in their willingness to seek necessary ongoing assistance (for example, if they required psychosocial support for longer, or in seeking more suitable permanent accommodation for their families), and to allay fears that having sought assistance from the authorities for that limited time would effectively allow the government to immediately seek to assess their immigration status once the amnesty had ceased to take effect.
112. I believe that a threshold on the scale of an emergency (for example, whether there is loss of life) could be proactively adopted by government ministers so that the issue is

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/05/grenfell-12-month-immigration-amnesty-for-survivors-announced>.

considered by the government more quickly and proactively, as opposed to by way of an ad hoc response to concerns being raised by humanitarian organisations such as the BRC. This would mean that those with an uncertain immigration status may feel more comfortable to reach out to the authorities at an earlier point, when their needs may be at their most significant and unmet.

113. It is worth noting that whether or not an event could be construed as one of ‘national significance’ should not be the only factor to be taken into consideration by the government in whether it decides to grant a comparable amnesty. This is because the scale of an event does not necessarily accord with whether or not those affected (and the numbers of those affected) have an uncertain immigration or employment status. The government should consider the profile of those affected by such an incident on a case-by-case basis, and then make a pragmatic decision as to whether to grant such an amnesty – and for how long – through a humanitarian lens. Express assurances should also be provided that the names of those who have sought assistance from the authorities will not remain on a database, to be followed up once the amnesty has lapsed, for fear that that may be the case may dissuade those affected from seeking assistance and thus impair the utility of the amnesty in any event.
114. It may well be the case that further legislation is required to underpin this issue, such that the responsible ministry – here the Home Office – has an obligation to consider such issues.

Ability to access benefits following receipt of cash distributions

115. Another issue faced by those who were receiving benefits from DWP at the time of the Grenfell Fire was the concern that their ability to receive benefits may be removed or suspended as a result of their receipt of emergency distributions of cash. This is due to the DWP requiring individuals to report any changes in circumstances to ensure that the correct amount of benefits are received. Money received from charities is included as a change in circumstance which must be reported to the relevant organisation from which benefits are received (such as Jobcentres, the local council or the Child Benefit Office).
116. To address this, the DWP granted a dispensation (so called “capital disregard”) for those affected by the Grenfell Fire, but in order to do this specific approval had to be sought from the DWP, which caused problems in the meantime. For example, some

affected individuals missed appointments necessary to retain their benefits, and so became subject to benefits sanctions or reductions. The BRC believes that there should be a permanent change to this, so that this does not happen. I accept that this could be difficult to plan for in advance of a crisis, but it could be again in the form of a legislative exception, such that benefits sanctions will not be triggered in relation to affected individuals in the aftermath of a major humanitarian disaster.

117. A further area in which the response could have been assisted was for greater clarity to have been given by the government in relation to the exchange of personal data in relation to affected individuals. It was apparent to me that either data protection laws, or the perception of the requirements of such laws, inhibited the efficient exchange of personal data to support the registration process and enable humanitarian support. Clearly it is difficult for central government to deal with this issue during a crisis. What is needed is consideration of the issue, such that there are clear, well understood provisions in place which both respect individuals' rights to privacy, but enable such individuals to obtain the humanitarian relief and assistance that they need in a crisis situation.

Adequacy of the Local Government Response

118. My perception of the RBKC response to the Grenfell Fire was that the council did not appreciate quickly and effectively the seriousness and scale of the emergency, what was required by means of immediate and significant response and the level of public concern about the fire and the response.
119. In the first 24 hours following the fire, it was my understanding that RBKC's emergency response procedures were triggered in respect of providing shelter, food, medical attention and other support in line with the resilience plan and in collaboration with emergency responders and other actors. Although I have not seen it, I would expect the evidence of Ms Spragg to deal with the resilience plans in detail.
120. However, as an outsider, it seemed as though the RBKC leadership was not thinking dynamically enough about the scale of need and response that was required. In addition, and, again, with the benefit of hindsight, there should have been more meaningful engagement with community organisations, who were likely to have had a better rapport with the communities that had been affected (and thus an understanding

of their needs) than the council itself did. In future emergencies, where we thought it appropriate to do so, we would be much more proactive in this respect.

121. Finally, and as I discuss at paragraphs 97 to 99 above, I believe that the problems within the registration process initially instigated by RBKC had a very negative impact on the ability of the responders to identify who needed help, what the needs of those individuals were, and the ability to track how those needs were addressed.
122. At the time I had spoken with Mr Holgate, I was not entirely clear as to whether RBKC was handling a chaotic situation as best as it could, or whether RBKC's poor response was making what was already a challenging and difficult situation worse. It became clear to me that it was, in fact, the latter on the weekend of 17 and 18 June 2017, when I spent those days at the GFRT offices. It was clear that the GFRT did not inherit a complete picture of those who had been affected from RBKC at that relatively late juncture. This early failure in the registration process (and even in the ability of the GFRT to address it more promptly once the size of the issue had become evident) severely impaired the ability of those responding to deliver effective support and assistance to those who were severely traumatised and badly in need of that help.

Adequacy of the GFRT Response

123. My experience of assisting with the GFRT response on the weekend of 17 and 18 June 2017 was that it remained chaotic right up until the Sunday evening. I was aware that the BRC was very busy on the ground supporting the running of the Westway, and that members of the Communications & Advocacy Directorate were there with me at the GFRT offices helping GFRT with its communications via social media and the press while the GFRT capabilities to do the same were being set up to be fully operational.
124. At the same time, I was attempting to engage with those in comparable senior leadership positions heading the response, so that we would be able, with the benefit of our mutual professional experiences and capabilities, to sit down and diagnose the issues with the response (i.e., to consider what had been missing from the inherited RBKC response, so we could determine where the GFRT response needed to focus its efforts), but I found it initially difficult to engage with those individuals. There was a difficult balance to be struck between strategic needs assessment and planning on the one hand and immediate action and communication of a position on the other. More

emphasis on the former might have paid dividends in the long run. I accept however that this challenge was exacerbated by the lack of any coherent registration process, as that made it difficult to identify, and therefore plan, prioritise and target the support that needed to be given.

125. In light of the above, and as I note at paragraph 80 above, I had been asked to issue a joint press statement, on behalf of the BRC, with the GFRT. I was only willing to do so once I was clearer on how the needs of the affected individuals were going to be met by the GFRT. By the evening of Sunday 18 June, I had formed the view that there was indeed some sense of coherence emerging, and that the right people were becoming involved, so I felt able to make that statement.

Adequacy of the Multi-Agency Response

126. The Grenfell Fire was an unexpected tragedy that had a significant and wide-reaching impact on a number of people. Responding to an emergency on this scale required a strong sense of collaboration and trust between various organs of government, emergency responders and members of the voluntary sector, to ensure that the best possible assistance and support could be provided to those affected.
127. I, and the BRC, consider that in the light of our experience in dealing with the Grenfell Fire, there is a need to strengthen working relationships between all those responding to emergencies on this scale in the future. Although emergencies are, by their very nature, often unpredictable, that does not mean to say that we should not do as much as we can now to ensure that we are better placed to deal with this unpredictability as it arises in the future.
128. As background – and as I would expect to be covered in more detail in the witness statements of Mr McKinley and Mr Lewis – the national framework for preparing for and responding to emergencies is set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (the *Act*). The Act is designed to foster multi-agency partnerships at a national and local level, and sufficient civil protection in terms of emergency preparedness and response.
129. The Act categorises those who respond to emergencies either as “Category 1” or “Category 2” responders. Category 1 responders comprise the emergency services, local authorities and the NHS, who have a number of statutory responsibilities to ensure

that they are able to respond to emergencies appropriately. Category 2 responders (primarily utility companies) have less onerous obligations. The BRC, and other members of the voluntary sector, are neither Category 1 nor 2 responders under the Act. Instead, the government has issued statutory guidance as to how Category 1 responders may involve those in the voluntary sector in their plans for emergency preparedness and response.⁴

130. In that regard, the BRC (and other members of the voluntary sector) are members of ‘Local Resilience Fora’. These were introduced by the Act to provide the means and structure for those involved in emergency preparedness to collaborate at a local level.
131. Following the Grenfell Fire, the BRC has begun to look at ways at which these multi-agency relationships can be improved. For example, the organisation has considered the extent of the involvement of the BRC – and other members of the voluntary sector – in each of the Local Resilience Fora (which are split into geographical regions conterminous with policing or county boundaries) to determine to the extent that each is reliant on the involvement of the voluntary sector in their emergency preparedness plans.
132. There is still inconsistent recognition by those authorities of the importance of the voluntary and community sector in any response to those communities and their recovery from an emergency. That seems, to me, to be a wasted opportunity. The BRC – and its comparable counterparts across the voluntary sector at local and national level – are highly skilled and capable in their fields and sometimes meet needs for longer than the emergency services.
133. We have therefore identified a number of areas in which we consider a different emphasis in approach might be adopted.
134. First amongst these involves the potential for the BRC to be proactive in assessing need and self-deploy, or as it is described elsewhere to exercise a right to initiate. This would involve the BRC responding proactively in response to identified humanitarian need in the aftermath of a crisis. This would not prejudice our formal role as part of the local resilience plan or involve cutting across protocols and security considerations, but

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-responsibilities-of-responder-agencies-and-others>.

it would involve taking a needs based approach to determine our response. This ideally needs engagement by government to agree processes and protocols for our doing so, being mindful of our status as an auxiliary to government.

135. Second, although the voluntary and community sector did what could be done in the response to the Grenfell fire, there could have been improvement in the collaboration between organisations in providing joined-up support. We have considered how, with government support, we could assist in developing and leading the voluntary sector coordination and capability.
136. In an attempt to address this issue, the BRC has been actively involved together with the Charity Commission in carrying out a review together with a range of other national and local charities with direct experience of responding to the emergencies of 2017. This review has proposed a Voluntary and Community Sector National Critical Incident Response Framework recommending the establishment of a National Emergencies Trust, and a Voluntary and Community Sector (*VCS*) Strategic Group for Emergency Response and Recovery (*SGERR*) to ensure the lessons for the sector from 2017 are delivered. The *SGERR* in conjunction with the National Emergencies Trust aims to improve the coordination across the sector for an effective, joined up and person-centred approach in preparing for, responding to or recovering from any national disaster or critical incident. The *SGERR* remains currently a work in progress. In order to finalise its status and effectiveness, the BRC, along with the other voluntary organisations comprising the *SGERR*, are committed to working with the director of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, the police and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In my view this does not require a huge amount of input from the government, but what is important is a willingness to commit to open collaboration and partnership and seek funding to enable training and practical support.

The Adequacy of the BRC's Response

The BRC's attitude to 'self-deployment'

137. As I note at paragraph 63 above, and largely as a result of the organisation historically adopting this role as an auxiliary to government, the BRC has, in the event of past major incidents and emergencies, waited until it has been asked for assistance from the relevant local authority before becoming involved in the response to that event.
138. Furthermore, the nature of the support provided by the BRC is typically limited to being along the lines that has been requested by that local authority (and usually with reference to the terms of the MoU that is in place between the local authority and the BRC). As was the case with my conversation with Mr Holgate (as I discuss at paragraphs 66 to 70 above), the BRC may, where it feels that it is capable of giving additional support over and above that which has been requested by the local authority, proactively offer that support.
139. Nevertheless, there is no obligation on the local authority to accept that additional help, and, in instances where it is declined, the BRC has historically continued to act within the originally defined paradigm. This stems, in part, from a reluctance to be seen to be 'overstepping the mark'. The prevailing view (traditionally held by both the BRC and those in government) that, in a developed and wealthy society, it is for those who have been democratically elected to take charge of identifying and addressing the needs of its citizens in a crisis. The BRC is there to ensure that that support is being provided through a humanitarian lens, but the organisation had been an adviser, not a leader, in the design of that response.
140. In light of the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire, both I and ELT now feel that it is not always right for those lines to be drawn so sharply. In the days that followed the fire, it became very quickly apparent that the response being run by RBKC was not being run as efficiently and adequately as it should have been. We received reports from our volunteers on the ground of the difficulties of identifying those who had been affected (absent any coherent registration system), and that even where affected individuals had been asking for help, the needs of those individuals simply were not being met. I reached out to Mr Holgate in light of those reports.

141. My offers of assistance were intended to try to help RBKC ameliorate its response by instilling some sense of purpose and order. I was aware that the BRC had experience and expertise in this area, given the fact that our responders are more often than not – in some form or another – called to assist local authorities in the UK in their responses to major incidents or crises. This has enabled us to build up a wealth of knowledge and expertise, which is supplemented, where necessary, by the work that is conducted more broadly by the International Red Cross.
142. With hindsight, it is now the view of both myself and ELT that we were wrong to limit ourselves in the initial phase to the formal requests that we received. We need to rethink the nature of our relationship with the authorities, and actively to balance our auxiliary role with our principles of humanity and independence.

Better community engagement

143. Part of the issue with the BRC being so closely aligned with the government (with the request for assistance from RBKC in the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017 under the terms of the MoU meaning that BRC volunteers were on the ground assisting with the response almost from the very outset) meant that certain of those who were affected unfortunately wrongly conflated the BRC as being ‘part of the authorities’. This misconception was, we learned, in part, made stronger due to the fact that our BRC volunteers wore their highly visible red workwear when assisting with the response, which had the effect of perceiving them to be ‘official’. We do need to be clearly identifiable, but we need to consider further the best way to achieve this.
144. In addition, we did not engage with the leaders of the affected communities as quickly, or as efficiently as we should have done. We did reach out to some of the formal charity organisations, but not to those with a less formal community base. Those individuals had fostered long standing relationships of trust and understanding that long preceded the night of the fire. Being part of those communities themselves, they had an innate understanding of the cultural and religious needs of those who had been affected. Many of our volunteers, due to the necessary size of the response, were drawn from areas of the UK not so as diverse or as multicultural as London, and so, correspondingly, far fewer were from similar backgrounds to those affected. It

therefore only made sense for those to seek solace, comfort and support from those they knew, and not from the authorities.

145. The question of how best to help might have also been better addressed had we engaged more quickly and more directly with the community leaders, the vast majority of whom were quietly and capably offering aid to those in need, without much, if any, input from RBKC or the GFRT. In the past, we have only typically done so at Local Resilience Fora level. This does not necessarily capture the benefit of the efforts of many of those in affected communities who provide their assistance and support not through any officially recognised or formal capacity that would typically engage at Local Resilience Fora level. Work needs to be done by the Local Resilience Fora (and the voluntary sector at large) to work out how best to engage with community leaders in order to consider what that engagement should look like in all of our local communities.
146. We have also made a very significant internal commitment to inclusion and diversity from top to bottom of the organisation. It will take time to realise this throughout the organisation but changes have been made at board of trustees and ELT levels, training has been rolled out, recruitment process have been reviewed and equality impact assessments introduced amongst other things. I considered this to be of such importance that I took the responsibility for leading and championing these efforts myself. We are not complacent, but I am pleased that we have just been awarded a “Leaders in Diversity” accreditation by the National Centre for Diversity. This accreditation recognises our substantial efforts, as explained above, in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion practices throughout our organisation.

Operational leadership on the ground

147. I am very proud of the efforts of our volunteers on the ground. They worked tirelessly in very challenging situations. Without them, we simply could not have provided the support and assistance that we did to aid those who had been affected by the fire.
148. However, and without diminishing any of those efforts in the slightest, I think that, upon reflection, we as an organisation could have had more senior operational leadership on the ground alongside those volunteers. Having people experienced in crisis response, and with a knowledge and understanding of the emergency preparedness plans for that region (such as Ms Spragg, or perhaps a senior member of

her team), would have enabled us to react more quickly and efficiently in identifying areas in which our response could have been improved. This would be facilitated by our adopting a more proactive approach to needs assessment and response.

149. In order to assist those who may be tasked with taking these operational positions of leadership in the future, we have recently rolled out new leadership training for those who may be deployed in response to future crises in this regard.

Fundraising and distribution

150. One issue that we have considered as part of the review of voluntary sector emergency response is the ability to distribute the proceeds of any fundraising appeals to those who are in need. This capability is inconsistent across the country. We have been very fortunate to work with excellent partners such as LET and Manchester City Council in recent times that have the specialist expertise and capability to make those distributions. But this is not necessarily available everywhere and we are working with partners to address this gap.

The future need for cash, not physical donations

151. Finally, and although not a consideration of the adequacy of the BRC response *per se*, I wanted to make a couple of remarks regarding the way that the kindness and generosity of the public, in the aftermath of emergencies or major incidents, could be best directed.
152. This generosity in the aftermath of the events of the summer of 2017, came in the form of both monetary donations to the various fundraising appeals that were set up, but also physical donations. This was particularly the case in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire. Perhaps what might have seemed to have been the most obvious way to comfort those affected was to provide them immediately with replacements for what they had lost.
153. However, and with the greatest respect, this intended kindness was often somewhat misplaced. Cash is both easier to handle and gives those affected by an emergency choice and dignity about the help that they need. In our international work, where markets are often far less developed than here, we are already making cash the default means of help for those affected by an emergency rather than giving them food and non-food items which are expensive to handle and may not meet their needs.

154. Furthermore, the sheer volume of the physical donations overwhelmed those in charge of the response at RBKC, who then sought assistance from the BRC to attempt to sort the donations in a semblance of an orderly manner, which, given at one point there were three outdoor exercise courts stacked high with physical donations, was by no means an easy task.
155. In addition, members of the public were perhaps not aware that only new goods were in a suitable condition to be distributed directly to those who had been affected by the Grenfell Fire. As explained at paragraph 93 above, second hand goods of a lesser quality needed to be either sold in BRC retail shops, under the “Shop for Grenfell” branding, with those proceeds going to the London Fire Relief Fund, or, where not of a good enough quality to be sold, needed to be disposed of.
156. It is also worth noting that (a limited number of) physical donations are of most use to those affected by a major incident or emergency within the first 24 to 48 hours of that event occurring. When people have been housed in temporary accommodation, they typically far prefer to receive a sum of cash that enables them to go out and consciously purchase what they think is best for themselves and their families. This allows them to regain and then preserve a sense of autonomy and dignity, which can be of comfort in difficult times (and this ought to be respected). And I think, once this viewpoint is more widely conveyed, everyone will wish to do so.

Concluding remarks

157. I wish to conclude my statement by noting that I have no desire to imply that those involved in the response to the Grenfell Fire had any lack of good faith. All I came across – whether within the BRC or externally – were attempting to work as hard as they could to do their best, in what were challenging, unprecedented and deeply traumatic circumstances.
158. Yet I do consider it important for us all, as a society, to think about and reflect upon what could have been done better. It is important to learn, collectively, any lessons we can from the response to the Grenfell Fire (and to the other incidents in the summer of 2017), such that those involved in responding to any future similar incidents are better prepared to do so.

159. I confirm that I am willing for this witness statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and for it to be published on the Inquiry's website.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

160. I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:



MICHAEL JOHN ADAMSON

Dated this 15th day of July 2019.