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Grenfell Tower Recovery Taskforce (PM)(17)(2) Minutes

GRENFELL TOWER FIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Minutes of a Ministerial Meeting on Grenfell Tower Fire

Conference Room F, 70 Whitehall

At 1100 Saturday 17 June

PRESENT

Rt. Hon Theresa MAY MP (Chair)
Prime Minister

Rt. Hon Damian GREEN MP
First Secretary of State

Rt. Hon Amber RUDD MP
Home Secretary

Rt. Hon Sajid JAVID MP
Secretary of State for Communities
and Local Government

Rt. Hon David GAUKE MP
Secretary of State for Work and
Pensions

Rt. Hon Jeremy HUNT MP
Secretary of State for Health

Rt. Hon Justine GREENING MP
Secretary of State for Education

Rt. Hon Greg CLARK MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy
and Industrial Strategy

Alok SHARMA MP
Minister of State for Communities and
Local Government

Nick HURD MP
Minister of State for Policing and the
Fire Service, Home Office

Rt. Hon Greg HANDS MP
Minister for London, Department for
International Trade

Dr Philip LEE MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Victims, Ministry of Justice

Assistant Commissioner Martin
HEWITT
Metropolitan Police

Rt. Hon Sadiq KHAN
Mayor of London

Rt. Hon Gavin BARWELL
No.10

Roy WILSHER
National Fire Chiefs Council

Katharine Hammond
Cabinet Office

Mark NEWTON
Ministry of Defence

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By teleconference:

Rt. Hon Philip HAMMOND MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

John Barradell, Recovery Gold and Chief Executive, City of London

Mark Sedwill, National Security Adviser

Secretariat:

J Kitson

J Lawrence

P Tallantire

ITEM 1: Current Situation

1. The CHAIR welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited Fire and Police representatives to provide an update on the operational response.

a) Update from operational leads

2. The NATIONAL FIRE CHEIFS' COUNCIL advised that stability monitoring systems were in place within the Grenfell Tower block in order to allow forensic and building recovery work to take place. This work required highly specialist resource and would therefore be time-consuming.
3. The METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE noted that there had been a high level of community tension following the fire. Two significant, but non-violent, protests had taken place the previous evening in front of the Department for Communities and Local Government building, and Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall. A further demonstration was planned at 1400 outside Downing Street. The police had deployed a light response to these protests, with significant resources on stand-by if required.
4. The METROPOLITAN POLICE also reported number of missing persons had reduced from 300 to 105; the police would report the figure of 105 to the media that afternoon, with the message that this number may rise or fall, once identities were confirmed by the Coroner. 88 Police Family Liaison Officers (FLO) had been deployed to 49 families.
5. In discussion, the following main points were raised:

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- residents were unsure how to access services and support and needed help to do so;
 - officials with high visibility jackets or similar should be deployed to the area to advise members of the community how to get the support they needed;
 - it would be important to explain that it would take time to announce the final number of fatalities, due to the challenges surrounding body retrieval and identification; and
 - some members of the public may be reluctant to come forward as they may not have been legally registered at Grenfell Tower. The Government should ensure that these individuals are reassured that no action will be taken against them; and
 - there was a meeting planned with members of the local community later that day. It was important that the government and Recovery Gold were represented to hear directly from those affected and answer questions on the response.
6. Summing up, the CHAIR asked that METROPOLITAN POLICE Service consider how best to encourage victims, friends and families to come forward to receive support and provide information on other people who might have been in Grenfell Tower at the time. In particular, to appeal to those who might be reluctant to come forward making clear that there would be no action taken by the authorities against anyone present in the building at the time. Ministers from the DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT and the HOME OFFICE should attend the community meeting along with John Barradell.
7. Continuing, the CHAIR asked that RECOVERY GOLD and the DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT work together to deploy a highly visible physical presence in the locality to facilitate access to support services.

ITEM 2: Update on key actions

a) co-ordination of government support for those affected

8. RECOVERY GOLD provided an update on the coordination of local recovery:
- i. Of the 845 individuals who had been evacuated, some had now returned, many were unable to return and some had chosen not to return. Re-housing efforts had been prioritised according to

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two categories: residents of Grenfell tower (Category A), and residents displaced from the wider community (Category B). Work was underway to re-house those displaced to properties appropriate to family size and need. Offers would be made to families on Monday.

- ii. A rest centre had been established in the Westway Sports Centre. Staff from the Department for Work and Pensions had been deployed to provide advice on access to support funding.
 - iii. A combined communications team was in place to ensure central and consistent messaging.
 - iv. The British Red Cross was embedded within Recovery GOLD team to coordinate the receipt of voluntary donations and support.
9. In discussion, the following main points were made:
- i. residents should be informed that recovery efforts were being coordinated by the Chief Executive of the City of London;
 - ii. there should be a single centre for the affected community to access services and advice. This should be appropriately and sufficiently staffed, including by central government officials, and kept open for as long as necessary;
 - iii. lessons should be learned from the recovery to the 2015 winter flooding, including visibility of support on the ground; a central team to coordinate recovery efforts; and the appointment of a single Minister responsible for coordinating efforts;
 - iv. the Coroner should hold a meeting with the bereaved in order to address practical concerns regarding body identification and burial;
 - v. discussions were ongoing between the Department For Communities and Local Government and housing developers to identify buildings close to completion in the local area where residents could be rehoused;
 - vi. it would be imperative for residents to help shape the Terms of Reference for the public inquiry;
 - vii. residents should be informed that primary care, community support and mental health care were all on site at the Westway centre, and that access to bereavement support was signposted by Family Liaison Officers.
10. Summing up, the CHAIR said that the DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT should confirm the number of people affected and monitor progress in meeting the three-week rehousing commitment. All possible avenues should be explored

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to source and, where necessary increase, the supply of accommodation. The rehousing commitment should apply to all those who cannot return to their homes, not just those from the Tower itself, and irrespective of their status or normal eligibility for social housing.

11. Continuing, the CHAIR said that the Westway Sport Centre should be kept open for as long as necessary to provide the community with an easy access point to support services. CABINET OFFICE AND NO.10 COMMUNICATIONS should consider whether there were independent experts who could help communicate key messages around the role of the inquiry and the relationship with the police investigation and coroner's inquests.

b) financial support

12. The DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS provided an update on the financial support provided to victims. In discussion, the following main points were made:
 - a. some cash payments of £500 had already been distributed to victims and this would continue for all those unable to get back into their homes;
 - b. Post Office accounts were being set up for those without bank accounts;
 - c. Many people had lost everything and had no access to money. After the 2015 winter floods, a 'no questions asked' immediate compensatory payment of £5,000 had been paid to all affected households.
 - d. these were exceptional circumstances and those families in receipt of means-tested benefits should not lose out financially if they received support from any fund.
13. Summing up, the CHAIR said that, in principle, every family unit resident in the Tower, or forced out of their homes elsewhere by the fire, should be eligible to receive a sum of money to be paid immediately via DWP staff. The DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT should come back to ministers later that day with a proposal on the practicalities, including the amount. The Department should also continue to provide regular public updates on the distribution of the £5m support fund.

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ITEM 3: Wider implications for high-rise buildings

14. The DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT updated the meeting on the work being undertaken to identify similar buildings that may also be at risk.
15. In discussion the following main points were raised:
 - a. it would be important to ensure that early information from the fire investigation fed into the wider safety investigations now underway
 - b. while not yet definitively known, it was reasonable to assume the cladding was an important factor in the fast spread of the fire;
 - c. the number of high rise buildings was not well defined, so a fast assessment was needed;
 - d. residents of other tower blocks would be rightly anxious about their safety. There needed to be a clear programme of inspection backed up by clear advice to landlords and residents;
 - e. close co-ordination with fire and rescue services would be important to support the provision of fire safety checks;
 - f. fire safety is the responsibility of property owners and landlords;
 - g. there were likely to be questions on the retro fitting of sprinklers and reliable information would be needed on whether retro fitting was technically feasible and if so, the likely cost;
 - h. there were examples of tower blocks in the North of England where retro-fitting of sprinklers had taken place; and
 - i. it took far too long for manufacturers of white goods to repair or replace appliances thought to pose a fire risk and subject to a product recall notice. There were cases of people forced to wait many months or even years which was unacceptable;
16. Summing up, the CHAIR invited the DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT urgently to identify all those residential tower blocks fitted with cladding, and to provide that information to local fire and rescue services so that appropriate fire safety advice could be offered to residents. Metrics should be identified to quantify and monitor progress in key areas. The Department, working with the HOME OFFICE, should identify what additional steps can be taken quickly to provide additional safety measures and advice to residents. This should include the consideration of a national programme to retrofit sprinklers into residential tower blocks. Communication teams should consider further what messages of reassurances could be provided to residents, and by whom.
17. Concluding, the CHAIR asked that the DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY and INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY to work with white goods

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manufacturers to accelerate recall programmes where there was thought to be a fire risk.

ITEM 4: Communications

18. The meeting noted that there would be a minute silence on Monday 19 June for the victims of Grenfell Tower. In addition a minute silence would take place before the Queen's speech debate on Wednesday in memory of all the victims from the three recent terrorist attacks and the fire at Grenfell Tower. A meeting was being arranged with residents and community groups in Kensington which would provide an opportunity to listen to their concerns and explain what support was being provided.
19. Summing up a short discussion, the CHAIR emphasised the importance of rebuilding trust with victims and the wider community in Kensington. Ministers should attend the planned meeting with residents and community groups to respond to their questions.

ITEM 5: Next steps

20. The CHAIR concluded that there should be a meeting of officials the following day to monitor progress and that ministers would meet again on 19 June.

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