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Grenfell Tower Fire Recovery Taskforce (PM)(17)(03) Minutes

GRENFELL TOWER FIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Minutes of a Ministerial Meeting on Grenfell Tower Fire

Conference Room F, 70 Whitehall

At 1600 Monday 19 June

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Theresa MAY MP
PRIME MINISTER (CHAIR)

The Rt Hon Damian GREEN MP
First Secretary of State and Minister for
the Cabinet Office

The Rt Hon Philip HAMMOND MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Sir Michael FALLON MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Amber RUDD MP
Home Secretary

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

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

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

The Rt Hon Jeremy HUNT MP
Secretary of State for Health

The Rt Hon Nick GIBB MP
Minister of State for School
Standards, Department for Education

The Rt Hon Greg HANDS MP
Minister for London

The Rt Hon Gavin BARWELL
No10 Chief of Staff

Dr Philip LEE MP
Minister for Victims, Youth and Family
Justice, Ministry of Justice

John BARRADELL
Recovery GOLD Commander

Sadiq KHAN
Mayor of London

Roy WILSHER
National Fire Chiefs Council

Assistant Comm. Martin HEWITT
Metropolitan Police Service

Mark SEDWILL
National Security Adviser

Peter HILL
Principal Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister

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Department for Communities and
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Melanie DAWES
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Home Office

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No10 Comms

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Cabinet Office Comms

Secretariat:
P TALLANTIRE
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ITEM 1: Retrieval and identification of the dead

1. The CHAIR welcomed attendees to the meeting and reminded them of the importance of continuing to ensure recovery work was in hand and progressing.
2. The METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE set out the latest on the effort to retrieve and identify the dead in the Grenfell Tower. Shoring had been fitted on the 11th, 12th and 13th floors to aid the recovery effort, and the expectation was that the removal of identifiable bodies should be completed by the end of the week. The process of identification would then begin in earnest. To date, five individuals had been positively identified.
3. The METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE explained that the figure of 79 individuals either dead or missing, which it had publically announced that morning, was a stable figure and was unlikely to rise further. The representative explained that Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) were working with the families of all 79 individuals.

ITEM 2: Support for those affected

a. Housing

4. The DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT affirmed that the Government had committed to

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rehouse in the local area all those whose homes had been destroyed in within three weeks. In addition, the Government would ensure that, in the longer term, those people would be guaranteed a permanent social home in the area. Westminster City Council (WCC) was now leading the rehousing operation.

5. Continuing, the DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT outlined the latest situation in relation to finding temporary accommodation for those affected. The effort to do so within three weeks was largely thought to be on track:
 - a. WCC had 40 members of staff available from teams across London. The process for each household was split into three phases (a needs assessment, a matching process, and offers of accommodation). WCC hoped to complete a housing needs assessment for every household regarding temporary accommodation by the end of the following day (Tuesday 20 June);
 - b. At that time, 217 households were being housed in hotels. Around 100-120 of these households were thought to be 'Category A' (former residents of Grenfell Tower or of properties on the nearby Grenfell Walk), but a final picture on this was still to emerge;
 - c. Estimates suggested that at least 150 units would be needed to house all Category A households. Private rented sector accommodation would therefore need to be procured in addition to social housing;
 - d. The Department had given clear instructions that accommodation should be overbooked to give those affected some choice;
6. Concluding, the DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT explained that, as of that morning, 49 needs assessments and 40 offers of temporary accommodation had been made. No offers of accommodation had yet been accepted, but it was noted that offers should begin to be accepted in the coming days.
7. The RECOVERY GOLD highlighted that there were issues with the provision of hot water and gas to a number of affected properties situated within the wider cordon (around 400 households in total). The RECOVERY GOLD raised concerns about the effectiveness of Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO), who managed Grenfell Tower and surround properties. In conjunction with the DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL

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GOVERNMENT, RECOVERY GOLD was tasked with considering how these concerns could be addressed. It was noted that all such affected households were entitled to hotel accommodation and access to the discretionary fund.

8. The DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT set out the position on rehousing options in the longer term. 68 units had been identified in a private property nearby which should be ready to receive households by the end of July. A further 30 units had been identified in Hammersmith and Fulham.
9. The RECOVERY GOLD noted that support had been forthcoming and that offers of accommodation had been made by individuals and community groups. However, there had been some unwillingness to engage with the authorities. The RECOVERY GOLD was asked to ensure that all such offers were acknowledged and, where appropriate, actioned.

b. Money

10. The DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS explained that key workers were working with families on the provision of central Government financial support. Once key workers had verified individuals' identity they would be paid the £500 in cash agreed to cover immediate costs (such as clothes and food). Relevant information will then be passed to DWP to arrange the £5k payment agreed for each household. Latest figures were that information from 72 appointments was waiting to be processed, with 24 £5k payments made to date. RECOVERY GOLD was requested to liaise with DWP on whether more staff should be deployed to expedite the processing of such claims. It was also noted that some of those receiving payments may not have bank accounts, and therefore may require Post Office accounts to be set up; this process could take several days. RECOVERY GOLD and the DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS were also requested to investigate whether this process could be expedited.
11. The RECOVERY GOLD noted that payments were also being made by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea from a discretionary fund. This fund was administered separately from the £5,500 offer coming directly from central Government.

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12. In discussion, it was noted that:

- a. those affected were eligible to receive payments from other sources as well as the funds being offered by Government;
- b. the process for claiming the money made available by Government would need to be streamlined in order to prevent undermining confidence in these payments;
- c. financial support should be available to all those living in the Grenfell Tower flats, including those illegally sub-letting; and
- d. the immigration status of those affected would not impact on their ability to receive the payments, and that no action would be taken against anyone who came forward

13. Summing up, the CHAIR confirmed that the £5,000 grant would be paid per household (one grant per flat) and that anyone who was living in Grenfell Tower was eligible for support. There would be no checks on claimants' status as part of eligibility process.

c. Health

14. The DEPARTMENT FOR HEALTH reported that 17 casualties were still receiving inpatient treatment in four 4 NHS hospitals. Based on the experience of the recent terror attack in Manchester, it might now be expected for more patients to come forward with mental health issues. The Department outlined that the steps it had taken to prepare for this, and noted that in addition the NHS London bereavement pathway was also in place.

15. To cater for those families displaced by the fire, the DEPARTMENT FOR HEALTH outlined that it had alerted GPs in neighbouring areas that some of those affected may need to register once they had moved into new permanent accommodation.

d. Coordination (local and central government)

16. The RECOVERY GOLD noted that links into the Department for Communities and Local Government were working well.

17. The RECOVERY GOLD explained that the Red Cross was helping to coordinate voluntary offers of help and materials, and was considering options for monetising donations due to the volume of materials.

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18. The RECOVERY GOLD explained that the 4 pairs of civil servants had been deployed onto the streets to offer assurance and provide information. It was noted that this had received a mixed reaction and that greater numbers were needed for this to be more effective.
19. The following main points were made in discussion:
- a. 43 social workers were being utilised as 'account managers' for each of the affected families and that key workers were embedded in the Victim Support Unit. Each family should have a social worker as a point of contact by Wednesday;
 - b. An external team could be identified to assist the operation on the ground, however it important that the effort was led by public servants as use of external groups could lead to conflicted messages; and
 - c. Could street pastors could be utilised for communicating with those affected and the wider community?
 - d. Six staff from the Home Office had been seconded to the Westway Centre to assist with travel documentation and immigration queries. Foreign consulates were also cooperating in offering support;
 - e. Staff from six Government departments were represented in the Westway support centre;
 - f. the work of many council staff in the aftermath of the fire needed to be recognised and acknowledged.
20. The MAYOR OF LONDON updated the meeting on the ongoing disruption to the Hammersmith and City line of the London Underground (resulting from debris falling from the building). Shoring up work to stabilise the building would allow the line to resume operating as normal.

ITEM 3: What went wrong

a. Investigations

21. The METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE stated that the Building Research Establishment had been on site at Grenfell tower since Wednesday to aid in the investigation of the cause of the fire and the contributing factors to its rapid spread. An interim report was expected by Wednesday 21 June and would be shared with DCLG in advance. The criminal investigation, led by the Police, to determine the cause of the fire was ongoing.

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22. The METROPOLITAN POLICE informed the meeting that 15 organisations or entities who had been part of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower had been notified by letter of the criminal investigation that had started. Rydon would provide details of all relevant contracts since 2007 by 1600 tomorrow, to ensure buildings that they had worked on were prioritised.
23. The NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL reported that they were still investigating why the fire spread so quickly, and why the protected route (the staircase) was not safe. There was also a discussion around the review of the 'stay put' advice for those living in tower blocks.
24. Summing up, the CHAIR asked the METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE to consider how much of the BRE's interim report could be released to the public. Public messaging should make clear that the scope of the investigation covered a range of potential factors associated with the fire, including the cladding.

b. Inquiry

25. The MINISTRY OF JUSTICE reported that a chair was being sought and Terms of Reference for the inquiry were being drafted.
26. In discussion, the following main points were made:
 - a. victims should have the opportunity to feed into the final terms of reference, and should have proper legal assistance;
 - b. victims should be kept up-to-date on the progress of the inquiry to provide reassurance;
 - c. communications should make clear the difference between an inquest and inquiry; and
 - d. there could be a role for a faith leader to help communicate issues around the inquiry to the victims. A similar approach had worked well for the Hillsborough inquiry.
27. Summing up, the CHAIR asked the CABINET OFFICE to review how the terms of reference for previous inquiries had been developed with input from families to ensure the experience is captured on how best to reassure them on the independence and scope of the Inquiry. The CABINET OFFICE and No.10 would consider further the way in which the chair of the inquiry is announced and what else is said or released at the same time as part of a wider communications plan.

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ITEM 4: Steps to protect and reassure residents of tower blocks

a. Identification of at risk buildings

28. The DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT reported that there were an estimated 600 tower blocks of six stories or more that had been clad. All housing associations and local authorities had been asked to send samples of cladding to the Building Research Establishment for testing, and to work with the fire services to ensure the appropriate safety checks had been carried out.
29. The NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS' COUNCIL explained the six story threshold was based on the 18m limit for effective pumping of water by the fire service with standard equipment.
30. There was a discussion around the action that would be taken if cladding was found to have failed the Building Research Establishment's fire testing. The meeting noted that this was the decision of the housing association or local authority affected, supported by expert advice from the fire services.

b. Reassurance and fire safety activities

31. The NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS' COUNCIL stated that they were reviewing the "stay put" advice issued to those living in large tower blocks, and would update the meeting and the public if this advice changed.

c. Other

32. The DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY informed the meeting that the department was expediting the publication of a website to get centralised information on product recalls for white goods that could pose a fire risk.
33. The DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION asked that the METROPOLITAN POLICE and LONDON RECOVERY GOLD help to arrange access to the still-closed Kensington Aldridge Academy. This access would help with insurance and contractors

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ITEM 5: Communications

34. The meeting noted that that the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service and the Minister of State for Housing were currently at a meeting with residents of Grenfell Tower to hear their concerns.
35. HOME OFFICE reported that they were trying to cement a public message to reassure all those affected by the Grenfell fire that they would not be subject to investigation concerning their immigration status if they made contact with Government or other authorities. The meeting agreed that the emphasis must be on obtaining as much information about the people present in Grenfell Tower at the time of the fire as possible, without concern for the legality of their immigration status. Arrangements with a third party were requested to ensure people felt comfortable speaking to them.
36. The CHAIR asked that any further ministerial visits would be co-ordinated through LONDON RECOVERY GOLD, and that Members of Parliament whose constituencies contained high rise buildings were informed of the ongoing work to identify and rectify fire safety issues.

ITEM 6: Next steps

37. It was confirmed that Officials would meet on 20 June, and the CHAIR would chair another meeting of the same group on 21 June.