

From: Sian Berry <Sian.Berry@london.gov.uk>
Sent: 20 June 2017 08:40
To: Ellie Robinson
Cc: Katie Smith; Mayor
Subject: Grenfell Tower - communication and outreach to wider community, and some specific questions and issues

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Dear Ellie, and cc Katie who I discussed this with yesterday.

Please see below a message with a number of questions and issues I received from residents and volunteers in the area of the Grenfell incident yesterday after I was asked for help. I would like this to reach the people running the new response team as soon as possible but I have not yet been able to track down a suitable contact, despite asking on site as well as via Katie who I met with yesterday about another issue but where this came up.

I hope you can help pass this on via the Mayor to the new response team and help get these issues dealt with. As you can see I think the primary issue is to set up some reassuring, helpful communication channels with the community in the immediate area around the tower as they are feeling they are not being kept informed and tensions and fatigue are quite severe.

Many thanks if you can help. I am also going to send the same message to the three ward councilors as they may be able to help directly with some of the individual questions.

Very best wishes,

Sian

Grenfell Tower - communication and outreach to wider community, and some specific questions and issues

I visited the area yesterday evening at the request of an ad-hoc group of local residents who had met earlier in the day to raise some issues with Lily Allen and her friends. This is not a representative group but seems to represent a wider problem within the local area where people are experiencing a lack of communication and a place to raise their concerns, which are different from those who are directly affected.

I noted particularly that the Grenfell fire response team, made up of representatives from central government, The British Red Cross, the Metropolitan Police, the London Fire Brigade and London-wide local and regional government is not in contact in an organised way with residents in the wider area. Residents on the ground need to know who they are meant to liaise with over day to day queries and how.

This gap in communication means that tension and distrust is quite high among local people, who are also traumatised and experiencing a lot of disruption, and don't have good information about what will happen to them then or

At the Westway sports centre, which I also visited, I spoke with volunteers and was told that the support for victims has improved since additional councils became involved but there are also some remaining issues there.

Below I've listed the specific questions and ideas I received under two headings to separate the concerns of survivors (reported to me by volunteers) from the community more widely. This cannot be an exhaustive list, which is why a liaison structure is needed as soon as possible.

I have not been able to establish yet the correct contact for the new central team, so I am sending this to the Mayor of London's office to pass on to the response team, and to local ward councillors who may be able to help directly with some of these problems.

Helping and informing residents in the local area

1. Communication network

I believe that within the new response team someone needs to take charge of building a system for communicating with and fielding questions from the wider community as soon as possible. I am happy to help as an Assembly Member but the fact I was called to help shows this is not currently in place.

The lack of things like a single point of contact and outreach workers in the wider area is striking. The Red Cross has made an initial effort to provide people on the street to answer questions but they have apparently been cautioned against doing this by the police. I believe a permanent visible street presence of either trusted volunteers or aid workers like the Red Cross is needed.

There should be a contact point as well as an official noticeboard for new information to be posted, as well as a space for the main community groups to make announcements. Arabic (at least) speakers and arabic language notices need to be provided among outreach workers/volunteers (this also applies to the online information).

The absence of this network so far means that any local area news that is available is reaching people fairly randomly. Rumour spreads as there is not a critical mass of people who are being informed of the correct information. One example given to me of when information didn't make it through is whether the school was to be open on Monday.

There also appears to be no system of email alerts to local people via existing local networks (the mosque, school, local councillors, church, community centres and sports clubs are all likely to have email lists for example, and could be used to cascade information more widely and directly). There is also no central social media presence with information for residents.

The Gov.uk/grenfell-tower webpage and the Red Cross leaflet circulated at the weekend both focus on people directly affected but could also include a section on the wider area. This website, set up by local people is starting to post updates for the community but it's clear they do not have very much themselves in the way of updates and information: <https://grenfellsupport.wordpress.com/>

People are clearly forming into groups and calling ad-hoc meetings to discuss things. Although I appreciate concerns there might be about calling an open public meeting for local residents to discuss practical issues like these, a drop-in centre with regular opening times, staffed by volunteers and the Red Cross who do not represent the council (which is very much not trusted at this point) would make a huge difference to how much local people feel listened to.

Finally on this - in terms of immediate decisions around the tower itself and the restoration of the area in the longer term, residents would like a clear role and voice established, and information about how they will be not just consulted but involved in decisions.

2. Specific questions and concerns

These are from my notes of the meetings I had last night and are a brief summary of individual issues raised. People on the ground should be contacted to get more details of these problems in some cases, and other issues are bound to exist that I was not told about.

There are concerns about dust and building debris being blown in the wind and want to know if there is a risk of asbestos or other dangerous substances being blown about.

Are there plans to scaffold the tower and wrap it in some kind of windproof covering that will protect the site for examination and protect the surrounding area from windblown dust and debris particles?

On transport, many less mobile residents are finding the closure of the tube and diversion of bus routes difficult. Could a voluntary organisation with minibuses be found to provide a shuttle service or lifts to these residents to nearby transport hubs?

The wider community needs good information on which roads and footways are closed and, when this is available, information on when they will reopen.

Privacy: people are clearly feeling somewhat under siege from the many people still visiting the area - this includes journalists, tourists and amateur photographers coming just to take photos, and what appear to be opportunistic lawyers.

- * For tourists, although the residents don't want a cordon or a feeling of being shut in, one thing volunteers could be usefully used for is to staff the road closure points and advise people approaching, especially with cameras, that people would appreciate being left in more peace if their visit isn't essential.
- * For journalists, it was felt that some guidelines on sensitivity could be issued. Again it's important that journalists have access, but people would like some respite after nearly a week.
- * Broadcast media continue to make reports in the area, and this includes a lot of foreign media. People felt some of them were insensitively setting up very close to groups of residents, recounting loudly details of the traumatic event, and sometimes pointing cameras intrusively at people experiencing grief or breaking down, even when advised not to. We are mindful of the need to report breaking news, but it might be helpful to advise to the media a smaller number of sensitively chosen spots to record their more general reports.
- * It would be helpful if this information was available with a map and written info to people entering the area with broadcast equipment, and again this is something volunteers could be mobilised to give people at road closure points.
- * People asked that some co-ordination or triage of suitable lawyers could be put in place. No doubt some of those contacting people in the street have good intentions, but if they could be pointed to volunteer to help via the local law centre that might help people to make an informed choice of advice.

People returning to evacuated homes: There were ongoing works to utilities already, and some people have reported being told to return to their homes only to find no working gas, electricity or water. This should be checked out and good information given about when homes are ready.

Survivors and families

Transport is also an issue for this group. Volunteers are making runs to the hotels people are staying in, and have made good contacts with people, but it seems like they need more regular visits from the official support team and Red Cross to pick up new questions and practical requests.

If survivors do need to return to the area to see friends or family or to visit the support centre, lifts should be available. I heard that Uber are offering free rides to the Red Cross, and this or another service could be extended to survivors until they are fully rehoused and in possession of the services they will need long term.

Similarly the collection of the emergency payment (cash at the centre, bank payments via a post office some distance away, apparently) seems to require help with transport to make sure it is collected.

Counselling seems to need more capacity. Volunteers reported they were acting as counsellors when needed but that professional help would be far better at this stage in the trauma. Counsellors who speak arabic and other languages that might be needed appear not to be available yet.

Similarly translators seem not to have been provided by the council. Volunteers have stepped in to cover this but it may remain an issue that needs looking at by the new team.

There are many questions about benefits such as missed appointments and the effects of the cash payments. There are advisors on site but wider circulation of the advice and reassurance would be very helpful.

Finally, it is clear there are a number of people displaced by this disaster whose immigration status is not secure and who are not reporting to the authorities even though they are in desperate need of help.

Recent Police announcements have attempted to reassure people and ask them to come forward, but it is the view of the community that only a clear, guaranteed statement that people will not face removal and will be able to stay will bring these people out of this situation. I don't believe this would set any kind of precedent and that treating these people properly as traumatised refugees in need of unconditional help is the right thing to do in this case.