
WITNESS STATEMENT OF LEANNE MYA JACKSON LE-BLANC

Preamble

1. I, Leanne Mya Jackson Le-Blanc, will say as follows: I make this statement from my own personal knowledge and from matters that I have been told about by others; where the information does not come from my own personal knowledge, I make this clear below.
2. I was a resident of Flat 6 Grenfell Tower at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017. I was at home in the Tower that night and I escaped the fire. I witnessed the early stages of the fire spreading and the emergency response.
3. I confirm that I am a Core Participant of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
4. I confirm that I submitted a Phase 1 Grenfell Tower Inquiry witness statement dated 18th May 2018 (reference IWS00000177_0001).
5. This statement is my second witness statement and supplementary to my first witness statement in which I focussed upon the events of 14th June 2017. In this statement I will focus on the days immediately following the fire and the provision of emergency relief that I received in the aftermath of the fire. I will also describe my experience of fire safety on the Lancaster West Estate.
6. I refer to paragraph 6 of my first witness statement and I now wish to supplement that paragraph with further detail. I am single and live with my son, [REDACTED] who is now three and a half years old.

Background information

7. Further to paragraph 7 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I would like to expand on the way I came to live at Grenfell Tower.
8. In terms of my mobility, I have suffered with some back problems in the past but I was able to walk without aid between 2010 and 2016 and during this time, I was living in a sixth-floor flat in Chelsea and RBKC were my landlord. This was my permanent accommodation. There were no lifts in that building and that was very problematic as my mobility is restricted.
9. I became pregnant in 2016. Living in a flat on the sixth floor with no lifts whilst heavily pregnant was extremely difficult and I couldn't continue living there. I moved in with my sister in Hayes when I was around six months pregnant. RBKC knew this because when I was around six and a half months pregnant, I called them from my sister's house to inform them of my change in situation due to the lack of lifts.
10. At this point, I purchased crutches online and was using these to get around in my Chelsea flat, just before I moved in with my sister in Hayes. I was also using the crutches to get around outside the flat, too.
11. In response the lady from RBKC told me that if I was no longer staying at my Chelsea flat then I was making myself intentionally homeless. She told me to come down to the Town Hall to get re-assessed.
12. However, this was impossible for me as I was living with my sister in Hayes and very heavily pregnant and was difficult for me to even leave the house. The lady from RBKC did not even try to understand my situation.
13. After giving birth to my son, [REDACTED] and leaving hospital I moved back to my Chelsea flat for six weeks.
14. I was given a commode by Northwick Park Hospital around the time [REDACTED] was born. I used to use the commode to help me get around the flat. Living in that flat for the two weeks after I left hospital with [REDACTED] was pretty much impossible in a building that had no lifts. It was no longer viable.
15. The ambulance used to come to my Chelsea flat to help me get to appointments as I was unable

to do so without help.

16. RBKC offered to rehouse me in a flat in Portobello Court Road as another temporary accommodation which was an emergency move.
17. I was not offered any other properties other than the Portobello Court Road.
18. [REDACTED] was around eight weeks old when we moved into Portobello Court Road in May 2016.
19. I was still bed-bound when I moved into the flat, which was also on the sixth floor.
20. The building did have a lift, but it was very small.
21. I still had restricted mobility and used the commode to get around the flat until [REDACTED] was around five or six months old. At this point, RBKC sent me a Social Worker who helped me get a wheelchair from a health service. The Social Worker was sent from a multi-disciplinary team, not RBKC.
22. RBKC had moved me to Portobello Court Road on a temporary basis as my permanent accommodation in Chelsea was no longer suitable. However, in this property, the doorframes did not accommodate my wheelchair despite the flat being approved by an occupational therapist as being suitable.
23. Grenfell Tower was the only permanent property I was offered as a direct offer by RBKC in January 2017. RBKC sent an occupational therapist who said that the front door frame of the Grenfell flat they were showing me was wide enough to suit my needs and ideal for someone with mobility issues. I felt that wasn't enough to suit my mobility needs.
24. My sister, Natalie accompanied me to view the Grenfell Flat in January 2017. Natalie raised the issue that the Grenfell flat being on the second floor and questioned what I would do in the event of a fire. She also asked the lady from TMO how I would cope with the heavy doors in the building and other issues which made the flat and the Tower unsuitable for me. The lady from TMO said she had noted these issues and would feed this back to RBKC.
25. I declined the Grenfell flat because just having widened doors frames wasn't enough for my needs. My sister and I made it very clear to RBKC that I did not want to accept the place because I needed a ground floor property.

26. Whether there were lifts or not, how could this be safe when I am in a wheelchair? But RBKC forced me to accept it and told me that if I didn't accept, it would make me intentionally homeless.
27. After I declined Grenfell Tower in January 2017, RBKC came back to me in March 2017. They gave me twenty-eight days to accept the Grenfell flat or they said I would be making myself intentionally homeless. This means that the concerns that were noted by the lady from TMO were ignored by RBKC who still forced me to take Grenfell.
28. RBKC told me that when I eventually moved to permanent housing, I would take my secure tenancy with me.
29. However, when I was offered Grenfell, RBKC gave me only a five-year fixed tenancy.
30. I immediately questioned why this would only be a five-year fixed tenancy and RBKC told me that I would receive visits at three, six and nine months in my first year.
31. RBKC told me that their system could not trace back enough to confirm the secured tenancy that they had promised me. Even if the system didn't recognise backdated payments, RBKC had promised me that I would retain my secure tenancy, but this did not happen. It was all a trick.
32. I thought, how could they not trace back the rent payments that I had made?
33. I felt bullied before the fire and felt that we never had any choice. They made us feel completely dismissed.
34. I had never been in a position of the unknown with my tenancy. What would happen after five years? I thought about what RBKC meant when they said they would review my situation after five years. What exactly did that mean? What was the basis of this? They gave me no information and that worried me.
35. Further to paragraph 41 of my Phase 1 Statement, I will always remember the struggle that RBKC put me through where I had to use the stairs throughout my entire pregnancy before I lived in the Tower. The tenant living in my Chelsea property before me also had a fire there so a fire happening was always in the back of my mind.

36. When I moved into Grenfell Tower I was still in my wheelchair.
37. After moving into Grenfell, I wanted to gradually improve my mobility by switching from the wheelchair to crutches. I was subsequently on crutches for months of my stay in Grenfell Tower and it was never easy for me to get around. Again, this was well known by RBKC before I moved in.
38. It was only around three or four weeks before the fire that I was no longer using crutches. I really did want to slowly be able to start walking.
39. It is important for me to address how I came to live in Grenfell Tower, as it directly relates to my continuing concerns regarding fire safety

Grenfell Tower flat

40. I knew the Lancaster West Estate and the area around Grenfell Tower inside and out as my mum grew up in the same borough. I knew that RBKC weren't the best landlord and there were issues with residents on the estates. So, I knew to be on my guard.
41. When I moved into my Grenfell flat, it was unfurnished. I brought over furniture from my flat in Portobello Court Road. I was also given a move-in package.
42. Initially, I was really annoyed when I first moved into the Tower. The living room was much smaller, and it was clear that we had been forced to move into a much smaller place.
43. Besides the wider doors, there was nothing inside my Grenfell flat which accommodated my disability. There was no wet room, no handles across the flat, nothing at all which made it easier for me to feel at home to assist with my limited mobility.
44. Every time I left the Tower, I looked at the huge glass notice board with information from residents and which was well publicised. There were many different notices about several different issues. It looked like the problems there had gone on for a while.

45. In addition to the accessibility issues, this also made me think about how I could appeal my move from Grenfell Tower.
46. I was very conflicted and not happy in Grenfell Tower. I spent a lot of time trying to think about how best to organise moving out of the Tower but at the same time I wanted to make the flat a home and make it comfortable enough for [REDACTED] to grow and develop.
47. I wasn't happy where I was, it didn't feel like home and I was forced into living there.
48. RBKC were forcing me to raise my son in a place they knew was difficult for me to get in and out.
49. They were fully aware of my situation with my mobility and knew I had a wheelchair when I moved in. They just stuffed me in Grenfell Tower for the sake of saying that they had helped me.
50. Before I moved into the Tower, whoever I would speak to from RBKC would reassure me that whatever I reported would be sorted out in good time, with no issues.
51. I therefore convinced myself that any problems that arose would get sorted whenever I complained during my time at Grenfell Tower.
52. Whenever I complained, I would always phone TMO first. TMO would refer me back to RBKC.
53. The complaints I made were almost always over the phone. I never put any of my complaints in writing.
54. I rarely went to the TMO office; it was hard for me due to my limited mobility. They would tell me that they have made a note of my complaints but then never resolved them.
55. It always felt like TMO didn't care.

56. I didn't know the difference between RBKC and TMO. The different responsibilities of RMO and RBKC in respect of repairs or complaints was never explained to me.
57. My recollection is that nothing I ever reported got resolved.
58. A good example of the lack of resolution by TMO or RBKC was the problem I had with my washing machine. The washing machine was delivered as part of a resettlement package.
59. The washing machine was fitted in the kitchen but did not fit under the counter as the skirting board was sticking out directly behind the washing machine, the washing machine in turn itself stuck out. The skirting board was either too thick or not measured properly. The workman who installed it said that there was nothing that he could do and told me to go back to the council.
60. This was a standard washing machine ie it had standard sizing. But the machine didn't neatly fit the space as a direct result of the positioning of the skirting board which itself stuck out. As a result, the wires i.e. the electrical connection and the waste pipe at the back of the machine were exposed.
61. I was extremely concerned that my young son, [REDACTED] could easily crawl round the back of the machine into the space and injure himself. It was a real worry and I simply couldn't leave it like that.
62. I complained to TMO about this, who said I must speak to RBKC. TMO also told me that because I had an introductory tenancy there was nothing that they could do about it. When I complained to RBKC they sent me back to TMO, who simply said if it is standard machine then it should fit properly. But it didn't.
63. They weren't listening to me and the health and safety concerns directly affecting my young son. RBKC and TMO sent me back and forth and my complaint was not dealt with.
64. So, the machine was exposed at the back but TMO never did anything.

65. I was shocked that TMO had asked me to call RBKC as if it was too big of a problem for them to deal with. I had told them I was scared the back of the machine and the electrics was exposed and reported to them that it was dangerous for me with my baby son.
66. I knew that TMO had a repair section. I didn't understand why they couldn't they send someone to deal with my complaint.
67. In the end as it was clear that neither RBKC nor TMO were going to do anything to remedy this, I had to get my brother to cut a chunk of the skirting board off to make the washing machine fit the space. and I also had to keep shopping or bags in the gap, so [REDACTED] didn't cut his foot as the cut edges of the skirting board was sharp. It was still dangerous even after we had tried to fix it.
68. I also recall that when the BT workers had to come to do repairs, there was a separate caretaker that had to come to open the basement. But you had to book in advance for this separate caretaker to be around to open the basement. It didn't make much sense to me. I wasn't in charge of my own utilities. There was a separate Caretaker for connectivity issues. That seemed to add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and organisation, that only held up resolution of problems.
69. Further to paragraph 28 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement I wanted to add some further detail regarding an inspection of my flat. Not long after I moved in some inspectors visited the flat, apparently to check the structure. I recall that they were looking around writing things down I didn't think to ask questions of them. But they didn't explain or discuss with me what they were looking at when they visited the flat to inspect it.
70. At first if I had an issue, regarding getting it resolved, I kept thinking I have just moved in, so someone is responsible for things running smoothly, surely?
71. I had both mobility restrictions and a young child. This was all well known to RBKC as my landlord. They certainly knew about my disability, as this was an important factor in where I could live, in terms of accessibility both accessing the flat, by reference the availability and

proximity to usable lifts and in respect of inside flats themselves, i.e. the need for widened doors frames etc , both in respect of previous housing and prior to being housed in Grenfell Tower.

72. Further to paragraph 8 and 31 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I spoke to an [REDACTED] lady who was also disabled. She was on crutches. She complained to TMO several times about the noise from the boxing club. She said she would feel things dropping on the ground and it felt like they would come through the ceiling. This lady told me that TMO promised her that somebody would come to her flat to carry out an assessment of the noise and measure the decibels. This had been going on for many months [REDACTED]

73. The lack of resolution of issues such as these made me start to get more and more anxious.

Gas

74. Around three weeks after I first moved in to the flat, I received a letter through my front door from the residents. The letter was regarding a company, National Grid, and the thrust of the letter was that they were seeking support from the residents to not allow National Grid to carry out works in our flats. The letter was informing us that RBKC were trying to gain our permission for National Grid to gain access into our flats, but the residents were standing against it.
75. The issue was with the exposed gas pipes that ran through our flats and concerns over health and safety. Receiving this letter made me feel informed and that I knew what was happening. But also made me aware that there were wider and other problems going on in the estate.
76. I thought that letter was a good example of the residents coming together because they were not being listened to. So, on one hand it made me feel supported and people were looking out for each other, but also that there were clearly problems on the estate with RBKC and TMO.
77. Receiving this letter made me feel even more anxious about the problems I was having in my flat and pressured me even more to want to get out of the Tower. The tenant that lived my

Chelsea Flat before me experienced a fire in the flat. Therefore, my anxiety and worry relating to a potential fire goes all the way back to then.

Doors

78. When I moved in to flat everything had already been done and I just knew that the flat was brand new.
79. I was given no specific information about whether the front door of my flat was new. All I knew was that it was a disabled fitted door because the door was wide, and the letterbox was lower.
80. The other doors in the flat were wider than a normal door but not as wide as the front door.
81. I don't recall there being smoke seals/strips on the front door. I could feel the draught from the front door.
82. I would like to add further detail to paragraph 8 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, to clarify that the front door was heavy, too heavy really to cope with when I was opening it whilst holding [REDACTED] and on crutches. It was a nightmare.
83. I had to lean against the front door to stop it closing or and take the weight of the door which then squashed me in order to protect [REDACTED] or somehow try to prop it open. This was the case every time I used it.
84. I would like to add further detail to paragraph 20 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement. My front door had a self-closing mechanism. It would close fast and would slam shut. Once you opened the door, it came right back at you quickly.
85. I recall that the kitchen door also used to slam so that also had the self-closing mechanism I think but I am not certain.
86. The other doors inside the flat were normal, from my recollection. I don't think they were fire doors.
87. Further to paragraph 23 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I would like to add that there was

also a draught which came from the kitchen through the kitchen door. As a result, I always kept the kitchen door shut because of the draught.

88. However, even if the kitchen door was closed you could still usually feel a draught. I ended up having to put a curtain over the kitchen door due to the draught.
89. On the night of the fire, the doors were closed. The living room door was probably a bit ajar. There was no need for us to close any doors when we left the flat to escape the fire because we came out through the living room window.
90. I experienced issues with the communal doors throughout the Tower building. They were heavy and on crutches I really struggled to open them. I always used to hope someone was around to help me get through the doors.
91. There were three doors I had to go through to get from inside of my flat to outside the Tower. My front door was the heaviest.
92. The second door was the doorway to the communal lift area. This door was wooden with a fob and was slightly less heavy than my front door. but I still had to hold it against my body to open the door. It just so happened there was always someone there to help me with the door.
93. The third door was the front door to the building. I would walk really slowly, but I would feel the need to hurry as the front entrance door would close quite quickly.

Windows

94. The windows in my flat were double glazed I think and soundproof. When the windows were open you could hear everything and when they were closed you could hear nothing, so I assumed they were double glazed. They looked new.
95. I did not have slide windows. The windows opened out and the opening was restricted for safety purposes with an extension to widen the opening.
96. Nobody ever came to inspect or re-inspect the windows. There were also no further works carried out on the windows after I moved in

97. As stated above, there was a draught from the kitchen. I don't know where the draught was coming from, but I think it was the window.
98. At night, even though the kitchen window would be shut, it would still feel as though it were open.
99. So even though my flat had been refurbished and the windows appeared to be new, there was still draughts.
100. Further to paragraph 29 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, both the extractor fan and window did the opposite of what they were supposed to do. Whenever I would cook, it would be pointless to put the extractor fan on as it did not work. I would always have to open the window.
101. Further to paragraph 52 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I complained to TMO about the light coming in through my bedroom window from Grenfell Walk which was stopping me from sleeping. I complained about this twice and the lady told me that she would come back to me. This did not happen.
102. On the night of the fire, the windows were closed because it was late and cold.

Lifts

103. I had to use the lifts regularly as using the stairs was not an option for me with my limited mobility and my baby son, as detailed earlier in this statement.
104. I had been in the lift with up to six or seven people at one time. People were squashed in there, but it was just about okay.
105. Having moved in when I first started to see the lifts not working and I reported it to TMO, I kept being ignored. I complained about the lifts at least once a week.
106. It was clear to me that I wasn't the only one complaining about the lifts. I remember going to the TMO office and seeing many other people complaining about the lift each time. I was not a lone voice.
107. An engineer would come to fix the lifts. But just as soon as a lift was fixed, the other lift would

stop working. It was like a relay, passing a baton, from one non-working lift to the other, back and forth.

108. Further to paragraph one of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I would like to add that the issue with the lifts not working started to become a fear. It was because every time I took the lift it seemed to be that one of the lifts was broken down. I was absolutely dependant on one of the lifts working.
109. I tried not to let the fear take hold and tried to remain as positive as possible about this.
110. I didn't allow the chances of a fire happening and or the possibility of both lifts breaking down take hold or become real in my head.
111. During the lift breakdowns, I simply had to wait for the next available lift. Using the stairs simply wasn't an option for me. At times I would completely avoid going out as I didn't want to put myself in that position. It was just too tiring to be stuck and waiting.
112. As noted earlier in this statement when discussing the background to my move to Grenfell Tower, and further to paragraph 8 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, my sister (Natalie) and I made it clear that the reason we didn't initially accept the Grenfell Tower flat as a permanent rehousing offer was because I needed to be on the ground floor.
113. One time when I was using the lift, I accidentally pressed the wrong floor number. I am not sure which floor I came out on because the floor was not labelled. However, I am sure that the floor was above mine.
114. On this unknown floor, I almost thought I was in the wrong building, I couldn't believe the way it looked so different to my floor. When lift door opened, all I saw was a dingy, old-looking, normal concrete Tower. It felt and looked like a different building entirely.
115. I had assumed that rest of the Tower would look as new as my floor and my flat did because the building looked new from the outside.

Gas Supply

116. No one ever came to check the pipes or the gas supply.

Electricity

- 117. Sometimes you would plug something in, and it would fuse. I would have to change the fuse. This was in the living room.
- 118. Something was not working, there was an issue with the fuse.

Fire Escape routes

- 119. I do not recall seeing signs with information about fire escape routes in any of the communal areas of the Tower.
- 120. I think that there was an A4 laminated fire safety sign in between the lifts on my floor, I do not recall there being any fire safety signs on the ground floor.
- 121. As far as I remember, there was a numbered sign on my floor.
- 122. When I went to the upper floor once by mistake a few weeks before the fire, I didn't know which floor I was on because there was no visible numbering. I had no reason to visit other floors. But when I accidentally visited the higher floor, I do recall that it was very dirty and unclear as to which floor I was on.
- 123. In the event of an emergency, I would have still probably got the lift so I could get out with [REDACTED] because the stairs were not an option.
- 124. In an emergency I couldn't lift him and if I had to escape with him via the stairs of the Tower I would have fallen and taken him with me. I knew that. That was never in doubt for me and never a viable option.
- 125. I hadn't previously thought about exiting or escaping through the window.
- 126. My back condition meant that I could not physically carry [REDACTED] and as a result I never took him out of the buggy.
- 127. So, working lifts and a safe means of exiting the Tower in an emergency was of great

importance to me, along with the other residents who had mobility or infirmity issues.

128. Further to paragraph 41 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, a fire breaking out at Grenfell Tower was always in the back of my mind.
129. I always remember the struggle of being pregnant and using the stairs and fear of losing my mobility and the knowledge of there being a fire in the flat I previously lived in before I moved into the Tower.
130. I kept thinking how a person would get out of there. I thought if something happens, would I even be able to make it out with my wheelchair and help my son get out.

Fire Safety Advice

131. Further to paragraph 17 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, both prior to and after moving into the Tower I was given no information about fire safety.
132. I must emphasise that my son was a baby. I could not pick him up due to my back condition. I was on crutches at the time and RBKC knew that. They knew about my physical limitations because the flat that I moved into in Grenfell Tower was for residents with disabled access. However, there were no significant adaptations made to my flat that made it more accessible for me. There was no wet room, nothing.
133. I had no idea where the meeting point in an emergency would have been and given no information about this. I didn't even think about where I would have to go.
134. The window was the last way I would have thought to escape from in the event of an emergency.
135. I was not given any information about fire strategy policy.
136. I assumed that in the event of an emergency I would have to evacuate but had no information about that.
137. With regard to emergency lighting, there was no emergency lighting as the light had gone in the corridor on my floor. When the light went it took a while for them to fix it. I do not recall

complaining about this. I would estimate that it took around a week for the repairs to be made.

138. I can say with certainty that there was no emergency lighting. When I escaped on the night of the fire through the living room window, no emergency lighting activated whatsoever. Furthermore, I know that when residents were leaving their flats, many people were using the torchlight on their phones as there was no emergency lighting to guide them in exiting the Tower.

Fire safety complaints

139. There were no talks and no safety information given to residents about fire safety.
140. I was not aware of the personal evacuation plan. I have no knowledge of this and it was not discussed with me at all by RBKC or TMO.
141. I did not make any complaint about fire safety. In my mind, by comparison to my previous flats which were on the sixth floor, this was an improvement. But I still felt that I had no choice but to take Grenfell Tower and it was better than my previous accommodation. I was thinking that I was relatively better than I previously had been. Even though I had asked RBKC to be on the ground floor, I had to settle for what RBKC were giving me by taking the second floor. It was the lesser of two evils and I had no other options. In my head, I was constantly thinking that it would be better to accept the second floor in Grenfell Tower for [REDACTED] This was better than being trapped on the sixth floor in my previous situation.

Night of the fire

142. I refer to paragraph 62 of my first witness statement in which I describe the events of that night with specific reference to how we escaped from my flat in the Tower and I now wish to supplement these paragraphs with further detail below.
143. I stated “ [REDACTED] came out before me. Joseph passed [REDACTED] over the gate to the lady”.
144. When we got to the window, I was holding [REDACTED] My now ex-partner Joseph jumped out of the living room window first and saw the commotion below and all around the Tower. He

returned to me having realised the severity of the situation, saying "let's go".

145. As explained earlier in this statement I couldn't escape the Tower by the stairs with [REDACTED] which is why I went out through the window.
146. In addition to that the smell of chemicals and smoke was so strong that I thought the fire was just outside my front door. Literally right there.
147. So, leaving through the front door was definitely not an option. For me, there was only one way out. Through the window.
148. People were screaming and yelling. I could hear people on Grenfell Walk shouting at people in the Tower not to jump and that the firefighters were coming to get them.
149. That was making us think we need to get out of here right now. The way people were screaming, it made it feel like the danger was imminent.
150. In my head I am thinking the fire has already spread outside my front door. We're in real danger.
151. After Joseph gave [REDACTED] to the lady, I made to get out of the window. There was no way I could have hoisted myself onto and out of the living room window ledge without help as it was high. It was about waist high.
152. To help support me, Joseph was outside and stood behind me with his arms under my arms, and gently pulled me backwards out of the window.
153. My backside was on the window ledge. Joseph was pulling me and when I came out of the window my legs hit the floor. He supported me but did not lift me off the ledge.
154. He didn't carry me out of the window. If he had carried me, he would have had to put his arms under my legs to carry me, which did not happen.
155. After landing on the floor I remember not feeling any pain in my feet or legs let alone my back. The adrenaline must have made me numb.
156. Further to paragraph 67 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I want to clarify that I was holding onto the black gate (which they only opened sometime after I had gotten out of the window)

and pulled myself up.

157. The wall that I had landed on and was then sat on was very narrow. The gate was in between two pieces of concrete.
158. I pulled myself up with my own strength and Joseph who was on the side but behind me helped me by positioning my feet on the narrow wall.
159. While I was standing on this wall, it was Elias Aitequakrim that grabbed me to help lift me down to the ground.
160. Further to paragraph 72 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I referred to a man with an axe. The reason I felt this way towards the man with the axe was because I thought we would be going back into our flats anytime soon. From where we were you could see the firefighters there and engines, I thought to myself of course they are getting people out. I thought no one was going to die; it is a fire and it is going to be under control soon.
161. But on reflection the man had come from the side of the Tower that was clearly ablaze and which we hadn't yet seen. So, he knew the severity of this fire and could see how rapidly it was spreading and seemed to be in a frenzy to try to break in and help people, possibly family and or friends who were trapped inside.
162. By this time the melted bits of cladding were falling from the Tower and falling all around and coming onto Grenfell Walk.
163. The entrance side of the Tower was the side I came out from. I was then stood outside of Grenfell Walk. When I was walking down towards the green area (away from the ramp) that was when I saw that entire side of the Tower was on fire. From the entrance side you couldn't see anything else.
164. I would like to add detail to paragraph 76 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement. It seemed like the police were going mad and screaming at everyone. They forced everybody off site. They made everyone cross over via the ramp next to Grenfell Walk. We ended up standing opposite Latimer Road station.
165. By then you could no longer see the entrance side. You could only see the left entrance side and back of the Tower. By that time the fire had wrapped around the Tower and as well as

debris, you could see entire window frames falling off the Tower.

166. It was incredibly dangerous.
167. Further to paragraph 82 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement I wanted to add that you could see plastic melted chunks coming down. They were big chunks of melted plastic but squashed and not entirely solid pieces. You could tell because of the way that some of them were floating and falling.
168. Further to paragraph 87 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I wanted to add that what started to get me upset was seeing the Sky helicopter. The way the light was coming from the helicopter... it made me sad that people, including families and children were clearly losing their lives and this was unfolding before our eyes and yet this helicopter was not actually helping in any way just filming it all happen.
169. I was thinking that the helicopter should have been used for the good. Residents were looking at the Tower burn and back up at that helicopter screaming and asking for help. You could hear children screaming. It was overwhelming.
170. That was shocking to me and still is.
171. Some people were livestreaming the fire on their phones. When people had their phones out, I was confused as to why people were using their phone in that way. At the time I thought that was it was wrong and incredibly insensitive. But I now realise that the footage was very helpful in building a timeline of what happened. I get it now. But at the time I was so upset.
172. Journalists were also reporting no casualties from the fire which was winding me up when people were clearly dying. It was obvious that we were watching a tragedy unfold.
173. I thought the helicopters were coming to try and save people. News reporters were coming trying to interview people amid the chaos. They were watching people dying and I was thinking that they should get ladders out, do anything, do something to help. It almost felt like a mockery.
174. By that time, I was by Latimer tube station and could only see flames on the Tower.
175. You could only see flames coming through the windows, no people visible in their flats, when

previously we could see people at the windows.

176. That confirmed to me that the people still stuck in the Tower at that time didn't make it out.
177. I didn't see anyone being rescued then.
178. The fire had engulfed the Tower.
179. People around me were screaming and calling out for their loved ones. People were trying to run around and find people from the Tower. It was utter chaos.
180. By then when the whole road was packed out, that is when fire engines arrived. It felt like it was too late. I saw two fire engines and then I saw ambulances lined up but that was it.
181. Further to paragraph 89 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I wanted to add that the reason why the police screamed at people to come away from the Tower and cordoned off the area was because they believed the Tower was going to come down. A police officer told me this directly.

Aftermath (Module 4)

Accommodation and Emergency Shelter

182. I wanted to add further detail to paragraph 83 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement as set out below.
183. At around 7am [REDACTED] and I went to my sister's house in Hayes.
184. Before we left, I just remember standing there until the end, thinking that that there was nothing left to watch. We were near the Tower the entire time. We did not leave until the sun came up.
185. I was so in shock, that I don't even remember the journey from the Tower to her house.

186. My brother, Karim and Joseph went to my other brother's house in Westbourne Park.
187. When [REDACTED] my sister and I left the scene, until that point [REDACTED] hadn't slept. He probably started to sleep just as the sun started to rise. But he woke up after about an hour.
188. When I got to my sister's, I was constantly watching [REDACTED] and fixated on him.
189. My sister told me to take a shower, change my clothes, put the TV on. But I couldn't do it. I was in so much shock. I changed [REDACTED] and tried to put him back to sleep. My dad came to Natalie's and brought a buggy and some things for us both.
190. Further to paragraph 98 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, I wanted to add further detail.
191. On the second day after the fire, my sister accompanied me to the Town Hall. It was quite empty which I was surprised about. There was no crowd and no queues; it looked like a normal day.
192. The lady who worked for RBKC told me that they were going to start finding somewhere for me to stay. She asked me a few questions and said that she would contact me later, which she did.
193. The police also contacted me later that day to find out if I was safe and whether we had survived.
194. We were given emergency housing in the Copthorne Tara hotel, all four of us (myself, my son, my ex-partner and my brother, Karim) had one room. There were only two beds. My brother slept on the floor. Karim ended up being given a room because the Social Worker took Karim on and ensured that he received what he needed as he was living with us in the Tower at the time of the fire.
195. Around a week after the fire, some volunteers brought up a cot for my son.
196. [REDACTED] had delayed speech and a delayed upbringing. All of this reversed when we moved to the hotel because he grew clingy to me again. [REDACTED] was supposed to be attending the nursery which on the ground floor of the Tower. Four months after the fire, [REDACTED] was supposed to start nursery. For me, this was the only positive of living in Grenfell, that [REDACTED] could have a good education.

197. The staff at Copthorne made us feel like second-class citizens. The way they spoke to us was very unpleasant. We survivors were just trying to feel at home in a hotel as best as we could given what we had witnessed and lost.

Food and drink

198. RBKC simply put me in Copthorne and did not told me anything about the provision of food and drink i.e. what I was entitled to, or confirmation that the room would be paid for by the council.

199. I can't recall if anyone told me that the cost of the hotel room would be covered by the council. I assumed that would be the case, but I was never told that.

200. In the second week after the fire, I found out about the hotel breakfast and dinner tab from my Social Worker. Later, my Social Worker informed me that RBKC were capping the food allowance that would be given to us at £60 a day for weekdays.

201. I subsequently asked my Social Worker about the weekends and whether by only paying us for weekday meals that meant we should just not eat on weekends? What were we meant to do? There was no answer to that.

202. When I did try to buy a hob to use to cook in the room in order to eat our own food, the cleaning staff in Copthorne reported it to management and we weren't allowed to use it. So, I put it away.

203. It was important for me to cook the right food for myself and my son. We cook Caribbean food for [REDACTED] at home, but the hotel only provided us with European food.

204. Sometimes we had to order in food. However, the hotel did not allow the food to be delivered straight to our rooms. Therefore, each time I had to go down and collect it, which was difficult for me on crutches at the time.

205. My eating pattern really changed, I got breakouts on my skin and allergies. It really affected my confidence.

Emergency relief

206. When we went down to Latimer Community centre. I was stood outside of the centre in the car park and saw all the boxes of stuff that people had donated, I couldn't stop crying. It was overwhelming.
207. Still outside in the carpark, a lady asked me what I needed. I said I didn't need anyone to give me anything. But I had to swallow my pride. I had no money and a baby to look after, so the woman started packing nappies and wipes. I got a buggy too and a suitcase to put everything in. People were incredibly kind.
208. Once I got nappies and wipes for [REDACTED], I wanted to make it last.
209. I heard about donations and thought that is not for me.
210. Information about who was entitled and to what simply was not readily or easily available.
211. The volunteers, Nadia and Remi, were coming around the hotels with lists of what they could get you. They asked me what I needed and what I needed for [REDACTED] I didn't ask for anything. I didn't give a list of things that I needed. It somehow didn't feel right to do so.
212. When I went to the Rugby Club approximately three weeks after the fire, they were replacing people's phones and laptops. I told them that I did not want a phone. I just needed a laptop to do music. I make music and therefore I needed a MacBook. I absolutely knew this would help me work through how I was feeling.
213. This was eventually given to me by the Arts Club after some trouble.
214. The Arts Centre told me that there was no one living in my Grenfell flat, flat 6.
215. I told them to ask RBKC who should confirm that I lived there.
216. To my astonishment RBKC would not confirm it. RBKC were supposed to be providing the information to the services and the communities. They were the ones that held our up-to-date information because they knew who their tenants were. How could RBKC not be the ones confirming that I lived there? How could a council of people supposed to be connected to the people they are serving not be connected at all?

217. I had to go back to the Rugby Club and then go back to the Arts Centre the next day to prove that I lived in the Tower.
218. I simply couldn't understand why the council wouldn't help me and confirm that I lived in the Tower. They had housed me there.
219. Everything I got was from Latimer community centre. I had to go there to get it.
220. After that it was just volunteers coming and offering help.
221. I didn't even know that Latimer church was connected to supporting Grenfell survivors. It was only because it was busy. I thought it was just people that had made donations there. It was only 6 months later that I found out who was who and where they were coming from.

Basic provisions and financial assistance

222. Further to paragraph 99 of my Phase 1 Witness Statement, my sister took me to my old GP in Portobello Road on the second or third day after the fire. They gave me crutches. I spoke about getting tired. I was in the hotel room all the time and it was so draining.
223. Before the fire I managed my back condition, I could walk around slowly and take the bus. But after the fire I felt trapped. Being stuck in the hotel room wasn't good for me in any way. There was not even an option for me to open the windows in Copthorne hotel. There was just AC and heating.
224. Yousef, a volunteer asked for a scooter to be donated to me. It was what I needed to get around and I was grateful for that.
225. In the immediate aftermath there was also a taxi system which I needed.
226. My Social Worker offered me an Oyster card, but I could not take it because I couldn't climb up onto the bus, especially with [REDACTED] This was offered to me many months after the fire.
227. I think it was in the second week after the fire that Theresa May announced that we would be receiving money. My Social Worker helped with that regarding going to the post office and this amount being cashed to us. My Social Worker had to verify the payments.

228. One of the most prominent volunteers, Nadia started coming to our hotel rooms to give us money in envelopes. She was very supportive. She knew that we needed help. She came on behalf of the Zakat.
229. Furthermore, Remi was also very helpful to me in creating a list of all the things I needed for [REDACTED] I didn't want to leave my hotel room so Remi would very kindly bring everything to our room.
230. I don't recall my Social Worker mentioning the Rugby Club. But in the weeks after the fire I met other survivors who mentioned Rugby and other relief centres and services. I therefore knew about these through word of mouth.

Psychological support

231. I asked my Social Worker for counselling right at the beginning.
232. Someone from the NHS came to Copthorne. I said I just want to talk about the fire because I could not talk or sleep. I just needed to get it all out of my system. However, I was told by my keyworker Ellen that you must wait six weeks after experiencing a trauma to be able to receive counselling. This was not right; how could that be okay?
233. It was only because I was writing songs and poetry that I was able to cope during the aftermath. It was my strongest coping mechanism.
234. [REDACTED]
235. I cannot explain how I was able to keep it together. It was [REDACTED] that kept me strong.

Information and assistance

236. Mahad Egal who I went to school with and who was also a survivor told me about a list he had compiled about who had survived. From memory that is when Rugby Portobello had a list and started to check details (around three weeks after the fire)

237. I never checked online for information.

Public communication

238. RBKC didn't contact me at all in the immediate aftermath. The first time was in fourth or fifth week was when they started to do the housing assessment.

239. I started to use social media to stay locked in and attend meetings. I started to contact people i.e. groups of people who were survivors, which seemed to be the best way to keep informed.

240. There was so much information flying around. It was chaotic. It seemed that you had to get out there and obtain information yourself, you received little otherwise.

241. RBKC held meetings in Royal Garden Kensington in around week three or four. People then had names written down and added to groups.

242. If I didn't randomly speak to people, I wouldn't have obtained information about meetings and what was going on.

243. Whilst I was in the hotel, RBKC called a meeting at Westway. At that meeting, it was Mahad who noticed a flamboyantly dressed man in the audience who said that he had a family member on one of the top floors of the Tower who perished in the fire. Because the community were so close-knit, he was asked some key questions and it transpired that he was an imposter. He had been sent by the council to attend the meeting and find out information. To infiltrate the community. We were outraged.

244. Through that my paranoia kicked in that RBKC would do anything to see what the survivors were doing, some kind of damage control?

245. On several Facebook groups, it was discussed and widely known that RBKC didn't know about certain people living in Grenfell Tower. Of the people who died, they were legal tenants and their own information was not up-to-date and held by RBKC. I will always believe that it was more than 72 people that lost their lives, that building was always busy.

246. In conversations afterwards and finding out people used living rooms as bedrooms made me doubt the official numbers. I realised this is much deeper.

247. The council were not there for the first seven days anyway. The community organisations were doing their best to run things amongst themselves because these were the places that people were going to and ultimately, RBKC were not present.

Needs of specific groups

248. To the survivors that had vulnerabilities and disabilities, RBKC should have offered a lot more help. Sending Social Workers and keyworkers was a cop-out.
249. What they could have done was have people at the top set up a system of contacting people further to the details that they already had on file. After this, existing members of the Council, even Council managers, should have been sent out, not random keyworkers.
250. The people that had been in the offices with knowledge of the estate and the community before the fire should have been more involved. They sent people from outside of the area which caused delay and confusion and doubt which was avoidable
251. I would have felt more reassured if they had sent their own people to help us and which would have shown us that they cared for us after the fire.
252. The fact is that we did not feel like RBKC cared for us as our landlords either before or after the fire.

Voluntary and community groups

253. Immediately after the fire, I didn't go to any community centres, I didn't know where to go. I didn't know about what was available.
254. The first week was a complete blur. I was in complete shock. I didn't go anywhere or do anything. I was so locked into [REDACTED] that I didn't know what I needed.
255. I only started to know about the volunteer centres and services available while I was staying at the Copthorne. My sister came down after a week in the Copthorne. We were together when we heard on the radio about the relief help available.

256. I didn't go to Rugby Portobello club until three weeks after the fire. When I eventually went, I saw that they were providing relief packages.
257. I started going to Westway three weeks after the fire.
258. The volunteers were always doing the work that the RBKC should have been doing. They would be liaising on our behalf. They were like the middlemen. If the volunteers hadn't been there, it would have continued to be chaos.
259. As I recall, within the Council and their response, there was a silver and gold command, they were people just above the council. Volunteers learnt to bypass the Council workers and communicated directly with the commands as they were the decision makers. I do recall that Nadia, the volunteer, stopped communicating with RBKC and just went to the commanders directly at the top.
260. These commands were disbanded almost a year after the fire. They were like the puppet masters that controlled RBKC.
261. Then, more and more volunteer leaders had a taxi system set up with the commanders. While it was set up it was useful.
262. After the fire, our voices were important, volunteers had to be the third person and speak on our behalf. We didn't want to be spoken for on our behalf, we just wanted to be listened to.
263. RBKC only started to help eventually because the cameras were on them and they had to rather than because they wanted to.

Coordination and leadership

264. RBKC didn't contact me at all in the immediate aftermath. The first time was in fourth or fifth week was when they started to do the housing assessment.
265. The best way to describe the first seven days after the fire is that it was like hell on earth. I didn't know who to speak to, where to go or what to do.
266. In the third week after the fire, Rugby club would have had to contact the relief centres as

they knew RBKC had not stepped in.

- 267. This confirmed to me that RBKC had a list of survivors and knew who to contact. They only knew I was alive when I went to them.
- 268. Before the fire I felt bullied and that I had no choice. They were very good at bullying you, pushing you into a corner and forcing you to do what they said.
- 269. Having put me in the hotel, that was all the help I received from RBKC or TMO in the aftermath.
- 270. There was no response at all from the central government.
- 271. We were disappointed when we found out that Theresa May visited the firefighters and not us, the survivors.
- 272. The Queen and Prince Charles came down and were shaking survivors' hands. I did not get the chance to meet them as I was not present.

Adequacy of response and lesson learned

- 273. The hardest thing for me is the fact that RBKC knew I came to them to be re-housed. They put me in the Tower when I made it clear to them that I didn't want to live there and was worried about accessibility.
- 274. They kept saying that they had never had anything happen on this scale, so they were not prepared for an emergency response.
- 275. But I believe that all their policies should include the event of an emergency.
- 276. If the volunteers didn't come to help us after the fire, the gap could never have been bridged between us survivors and the Council.
- 277. By the time we were put into hotels, RBKC knew where they had put us. They knew where we were and how to contact us. At that point even, they could have come to the hotels. They didn't.
- 278. What were they hiding from, why didn't they come to see us?

279. RBKC knew who I was and where I was because they were paying to put me there.
280. It felt as though they considered us as peasants who lived in this old Tower building.
281. Also, to add insult the way they acted after the fire made us feel that they thought that they were giving us access to a luxury that otherwise we would never have experienced, by staying in hotels. It also felt that they were doing us a favour.
282. But hotels could never replace the feeling of having a home after we had lost our homes.
283. RBKC just wanted to stuff me in a GP room. I never trusted RBKC and felt constantly paranoid that everything I said would be used against me.
284. The key workers were supposed to replace the volunteers. The constant change of keyworkers didn't help at all.
285. RBKC also knew about my [REDACTED] pregnancy and limited mobility. But that was ignored and/ or overlooked.
286. I was constantly paranoid. During my stay in the hotel, I got paranoid and thought RBKC put listening devices in the rooms. If I could change hotel room every day I would have.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are true.

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

Signed:

Leanne Jackson Le Blanc

Date:

11.02.20