

IN THE MATTER OF THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF REEM DEDRICH

I, Reem Dedrich [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] make this statement in relation to Phase Two of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Introduction

1. This statement is in addition to my statement previously made in relation to Phase One of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I will therefore only address the issues relating to Modules 3 and 4 in this statement.
2. I previously lived with my mother, Fatima Dedrich in Flat 123 Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London W11 1TQ. Our floor changed to the 15th floor after the refurbishment works were completed.
3. I moved into Grenfell Tower in 2003, when I was seven years old.

Fire Safety

Fire Safety Systems

4. The fire hose was located by my flat entrance door, on my side of the communal hallway. There was no fire extinguisher on my floor, just the hose in an enclosed box.

Lifts

5. The lifts often broke down. The lift would break down maybe around 4 times a year, the TMO would fix it and then 2 weeks later it would break down again. I remember once when the lift was not working for a week and everyone was walking up and down the tiny staircase.
6. I did not even try to use the lift on the night of the fire. Even if I had tried, I would not have seen the lift because it was too dark in the hallway as it was full of smoke. The only reason I saw the fire door was because I could see the staircase light shining through the glass of the fire door.

Flat doors

7. Our flat door was replaced around the beginning of the Rydon refurbishments, around the end of 2014. My mum was at the flat when they replaced the door as I was at school. As far as I am aware, employees of Rydon just told her that it was a fire door and showed her how to lock it.

8. I remember that there was a leaflet that we were given from which we had to tick to choose the colour and style of the door, and we sent it back. This was the only involvement we had with the new doors. The new flat door had glass in the shape of half a circle on top.
9. There were no inspections or fire safety checks carried out in relation to the new flat entrance doors after they were installed.
10. The new doors had new locks, including a lever which you had to pull to lock the door. When the door was opened, it was really heavy to pull and it also created a draught. Apparently, the new door was a fire door, but it had a glass window on it with a wire mesh insert in the glass.

Communal Doors

11. I think that the door on the communal staircase had a sign that said, "fire door".

Windows

12. The old windows did not really have a draught, but you could hear the windows whirring, and if you put your finger on the window you could feel the glass shaking. At paragraph 13 of my Phase 1 witness statement I noted that the windows before the refurbishment allowed rain into the flat. When it rained heavily the water would come in through the window surrounds. My mum would put cloths around the windows when it rained so that the water would not come into the flat, otherwise the furniture would get wet. That was an ongoing issue which was never resolved until the refurbishment.
13. Once Rydon started the refurbishment works, six old windows were removed and new ones were installed on the same day. I remember a woman called Linda, who worked for Rydon, was not very helpful when we commented that it would be difficult to stay in and wait for the workmen all day. She told us this was the only available appointment and we had to stay in until they completed the works.
14. When the builders took the windows out a lot of dirt came into the flat due to the high winds outside. We would hear a 'whirring' noise and then all of the dust would come into the flat. Having the windows open like this disrupted my mum's business as she was an at-home tailor and customers would come to the flat whilst there were no windows. We were concerned because we thought they would not finish replacing them on the same day.
15. The new windows were better than the old ones because they were newer. The glass and the frames of the old windows were thin, with rusty metal frames. I remember that we were quite impressed with the new windows because the water could no longer come in, but we could still hear the whirring noise through the windows when it was windy because it was really high up.
16. I mentioned, at paragraph 13 of my Phase 1 witness statement, that there was no draught coming from the new windows on the night of the fire. On reflection, I remember that the new windows allowed a draught in prior to the fire but post refurbishment, but it was not significant. However, the new windows did make a rattling sound and I could not sleep at night when I heard it.

Extractor Fan

17. Rydon fitted an extractor fan in the kitchen which did not work. It just made a horrible noise and when we told them, they did not do anything about it.

Smoke Alarms

18. We had a smoke alarm in the corridor and in the kitchen. It was working as it would go off if I burnt something whilst cooking, however no one ever came to check if it was working.
19. I assumed there would be a fire alarm in the building as well but do not know for sure whether there was as I have never heard an alarm going off in the building. I did not hear any fire alarms going off, before the fire or on the night of the fire.
20. I did not hear the smoke alarm ringing on the night of the fire which is why I initially thought that the incident must not have been serious. But the second I even looked out of the peephole of the flat door, the hallway was black and filled with smoke so I do not know why the smoke alarms did not go off.

Fire Safety Checks/Inspections

21. No one ever undertook fire safety checks. To my recollection they just checked the fire alarms and carbon monoxide alarms inside our flat.
22. The smoke alarms were changed by TMO every 10 years and the carbon monoxide alarm every four years. There were two smoke alarms in the flat, one in the hallway and one in the kitchen, above the fridge. I never complained about fire safety because I thought that in the event of a fire they would work however, on the night of the fire I did not hear the fire alarm go off. I was lucky that I looked out of the window and saw the fire.

Fire safety advice

23. When I first moved into Grenfell Tower, I received no fire safety advice. I was not aware that there was a fire strategy or policy in the Tower. Prior to the 14th June 2017, I did not have any knowledge of the 'stay put' policy, neither was I made aware of it in any way. All I knew was what I learned at school, which would be to get out quickly and go to an assembly point in the event of a fire. I do not understand how someone can tell you not to go out of the building when everyone is taught at school to go to a safety point in the event of a fire. I did not know where the assembly point was in relation to evacuation of the Tower.
24. At paragraph 18 of my Phase 1 statement I mentioned that I was told, after the fire on the 14th June 2017, that there had been posters on the inside walls that said if there was ever a fire, then the residents should stay in their flats. I did not see such signs or posters in the Tower saying 'stay put' in the event of a fire.

25. I have never seen the colours red and green against a white background on a sign or poster at Grenfell Tower. Luckily, I did not see these posters, otherwise I would have done as directed. On the night of the fire, I just ran out in the same direction as those fleeing the fire.
26. I received no communication about fire safety advice so I did not know about it.
27. I do not think that there were any meetings or events regarding fire safety in the Grenfell Tower. I did not get any letters about any meetings or events regarding fire safety in the Tower either.
28. I do remember thinking before the fire that my mum would be vulnerable in the event of a fire. My mum has impaired mobility whereby her back and legs seize up in pain when she is in shock, therefore it would have taken her longer to go down the stairs to exit the building on the night of the fire and she may even have been stuck. There was no attempt made by anyone to discuss an escape route for her in the event of an emergency. Ever since the fire, my mum's mobility has worsened, when she gets a shock or a scare, her legs and back have been hurting and it hasn't been the same.

Fire safety complaints

29. When we had complaints or issues with the flat, we contacted the TMO. I believe we raised a complaint in relation to issues with the heating or hot water but I cannot remember the exact date. When we first moved in the central heating was always on and you could feel the heat coming up through the floor. Whenever we had visitors they always commented how warm it was. However after the refurbishment, the central heating was turned off and it was very cold, it went from one extreme to another. The hot water often wouldn't work and then someone from the council attended to fix it. This definitely occurred on multiple occasions.
30. We also raised complaints about the extractor fans and how they made extremely loud and horrible noises. We complained to the TMO and they directed us to make a complaint to Rydon because it was Rydon who had carried out the works. When we told Rydon about it, they said that the noise was normal and they took no action to try and fix it. We had a major problem about who to complain to because the TMO would say that it was not their problem, and Rydon said that they were not the landlord, so it was not their responsibility either. At least we could physically go to the TMO office, but when the TMO denied responsibility and shifted the blame to Rydon we did not know where to go to bring these issues to Rydon's attention. There was a complete lack of acceptance of responsibility from both of these parties to address issues that arose as a result of the refurbishment works, and issues were never resolved.

Aftermath

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

Relief Centres

31. Once I escaped the Tower, I immediately went to my aunt's house and luckily I had family around as I had lost my home. I could not sleep and so I just kept watching the news all night, watching to see the events unfolding around the Tower. I saw on the news that survivors were being directed to Rugby Portobello Club, Westway Centre or the church.
32. After seeing the news, I went to the Rugby Portobello Club on the morning after the fire. However when I arrived, there was a police officer saying that the club was full to capacity and that no one else could go inside. I remember there was security outside the club and there was a woman nearby screaming to be let in. Eventually, some people came out of the club and I was told that I could go in. When I went inside I was surprised that it was near empty but I still had to wait to be seen by one of the staff. They asked me what floor of Grenfell Tower I lived on and took our phone numbers. They told me that someone would call me as soon as they arranged accommodation.
33. At around 6 or 7pm that day, I was notified that I had been given a room in the Holiday Inn in Earls Court in Fulham, at North End Road. I was told to just provide my name at reception and that I would be given a room key. However, I was not sure how I was supposed to get there until they arranged transport by mini cab. No car arrived after an hour and a half so we made our own way to the hotel. Only once we had arrived at the hotel, the driver called me and stated that he was waiting to collect us. It was complete chaos and so disorganised.
34. I went to the Westway Centre every day to try and find out what was going on and there they gave me clothes, food and water.
35. I also attended the Clements James Centre and Al Manaar Mosque and also Portobello Rugby Club where I was given funds to live off. I received funds from various newspapers also.

Accommodation

36. We stayed at the Holiday Inn in Fulham for two weeks. We did not like it because we were so far from everything and no longer in the borough. The staff at that hotel were not very welcoming and we found them to be very rude. The hotel did not provide us with any food for the two weeks we were there so we would just eat with friends or family. Also, we were so cramped in that room because my mum and I had to share a bed.
37. After that, we were moved to the Radisson in Gloucester Road which was better because my mum was able to park her car there. We were there for 2 months but the food was so bad. Initially, we were given food cards with money on them but these were stopped quite quickly as I think people were losing them. When we moved to the Radisson, they told us that we were allowed 3 meals a day in the hotel, but I found that the food got repetitive and I could not eat hotel food every day, I don't think anyone could. We later found out that you could either have the hotel food or 3 meals a day away from the hotel. I think this information got passed to us through word of mouth but the Council certainly did not tell us about this. We then asked the keyworker who then said she would find out. The keyworker

did manage to find out this information and she explained that we could have a fund for the week to spend on food how we wanted to. This was so much better as we did not have to eat the hotel food every day.

38. We then moved to the Holiday Inn in Kensington and that was good for me as it was just a walk away from university and close to my auntie's house. We stayed there until February 2018. In total, we lived in a hotel for 6 months. Transition
39. We got our permanent property in December 2017 but we had to push for it. They showed us many places for accommodation and we were given a leaflet with various possible properties and we could choose which one we wanted. This process started in the summer 2017, and on the 21st of August they told us that the online process was open where you could vote for your first preference. My mum wanted to quickly state preferences. This was like we were auctioning for something on eBay and completely inappropriate for choosing accommodation.
40. We had a few viewings for various properties. My mum knew she wanted this property which we live at now. We had a viewing in Chelsea, at Hortensia, which they have just found out also has flammable insulation and cladding. We had been living for 6 months at 3 different hotels and my mum was ready to take any accommodation since she was fed up with being in hotels. We wanted to be able to go home to be able to buy our own groceries and eat home cooked food.
41. We found the whole bidding process to be extremely stressful we had never had experience of choosing a house online, as permanent accommodation. We got to see the property only after we had picked it, which was very strange. The properties didn't even look like the photos in the brochure. We felt pressure in choosing a new home. We did not want to stay in the hotels any longer, so this was definitely a driving force when picking a home. Although it took a long time to get our home, we are now happy in our current accommodation.

Food and Drink

42. Whilst we were in the hotels, the council provided us with an allowance and told us to buy our own food. We got so sick of eating out and my mum got really annoyed as she wanted to cook her own food.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

43. I contacted RBKC quite regularly and they were fairly responsive when it came to housing issues but with finance queries, they were very slow.
44. They would delay providing my food allowance money for up to a month which was obviously extremely inconvenient. We were fasting during the day but charities were bringing us food, and it was mainly charities that were bringing supplies and not the Council.

45. I would have liked more transport support to be offered. There were many places that we had to go to that were far away or difficult to reach and we had to pay a lot of money for public transport. Luckily I was on the summer break so I did not have to travel to university every day. They did give me an Oyster card which would have enough funds for 1 month on it, but then after the funds had run out I had to call to renew it. It would have preferred if better transport arrangements had been made.
46. I had no clothes as they were all destroyed in the fire and I got clothes from the charities and the Rugby club transformed one of its rooms into a thrift shop where clothes were available for us to take. I was able to find clothes in my size. A lot of companies were giving new things away, like shampoos and other essential items.
47. Some charities brought food to the hotel (Holiday Inn) and they also brought the necessities (like toiletries, nappies and shampoo) to a room in the hotel where there were massive storage boxes where we could tell them what we needed.

Psychological Support

48. The NHS offered me psychological support in the beginning.
49. When I was at the Westway Centre, just after the fire, I went to the NHS Department. I think that the Westway Centre was open for about a month or so after the fire. They were offering support for victims and therapy so I thought I should use it. They offered to support me but I had no idea that I had anxiety, depression and PTSD. If I had not bumped into them at the Westway Centre, I would not have received treatment or have even been diagnosed with these conditions.
50. My first appointment was at Charing Cross Hospital. This was far for me to travel to and I stated that this hospital was so far out of the borough and I could not keep having to pay for parking every time. I asked to be moved and they agreed to transfer me to Chelsea Hospital.
51. I started attending Chelsea Hospital which was much more convenient and after the first appointment, the doctor had diagnosed me with anxiety, depression and PTSD. I was so shocked, I did not know I was suffering from this and in fact I had never heard of PTSD before this.
52. I was allocated my keyworker from Barnet for the duration of four months. After her, I was contacted every week to inform me that a new keyworker had been assigned to me. I had one for a month or so and rarely saw her which was unhelpful. The lack of continuity was an issue, as I would rather not have these updates all the time. I had a separate key worker to my mum, and we did not know what was going on. It would have been much better if my mum and I had the same key worker for longer periods of time.
53. Having said that, the key worker from Barnet was so helpful because anything we would ask her, she would be able to do it. She helped my mum with PIP and always informed us of what we were eligible for.

54. I took a long break from treatment after being with Chelsea hospital and after this break I started receiving treatment from Corpore. I like my current therapist, she is nice and it seems to be working well for me.

Public Communication

55. All the dissemination of information, regarding support, was done by word of mouth at the beginning. A lot of the time we found out information about donations through friends.
56. It would also have been helpful to have had information published in one location such as a website for Grenfell Tower survivors where all the information about we were entitled to would be available, rather than hearing small pieces of information through word of mouth. At the time, the RBKC website was not informative.
57. Instead, I had to go to the Westway Centre every day to see what was going on and to be updated.
58. I only found out through friends and family that charities were giving out money and also that high street shops like Marks & Spencer were providing gift cards to Grenfell Tower survivors.

Voluntary and Community Groups

59. I spoke to some Red Cross staff at the Westway Centre who said that they were making available a small fund to people who were bereaved or in hospital for a set period. A few days after the fire, I spent some time in hospital because of an infection as a result of the fire, so Red Cross donated some money to me.
60. I lost my laptop in the fire. I went to the mosque where one guy had a workshop donating – laptops, so I went and got one. They gave you the voucher in the mosque to get it in the workshop. This man giving the vouchers was just a member of the public who lived in the area who had made phone calls to Google and PC World, he was not part of any charities or the council. The support from the public was amazing.

Coordination and Leadership

61. My view of the Council in the first few days and weeks of the fire was that they were suddenly trying to fix everything. But it felt as if the employees of the Council were just doing what they were told.
62. At times, there were so many staff members from RBKC, so many people but I felt like there was no action. Everyone would be sitting there with a laptop. There were people from various departments like housing, immigration and even things you wouldn't even think about like British Gas.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

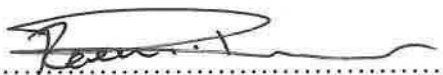
63. To summarise the overall adequacy of the help teams, I would say that charities helped the most without question. I got what I eventually needed but unfortunately, I just had to work it all out by myself.

64. Further, as our landlord, RBKC ought to have known who lived in the Tower. The council were asking me who I was and when I started renting the flat from them. I just did not understand why the Council did not have files and a list of current tenants. It was extremely tiring having to explain myself at every turn, including who I was and where I lived, when I had been living in Grenfell Tower since 2003.

65. I would advise the Council to be more organised in assisting the survivors in future.

I believe the contents of this witness statement to be true.

Signed.....



Date: ...13/02/2020

REEM DEDRICH