

Witness Statement of: Hazel Burke

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GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HAZEL BURKE

I, **HAZEL BURKE**, will say as follows:

1. I am a resident at [REDACTED] Barandon Walk and I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I did not give a Phase 1 statement, as I did not become a Core Participant until after the Phase 1 statement deadline.
2. This statement is a factual statement prepared for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. It does not fully explain my experiences on the night of the fire, or the impact that these events have had on me and my family.

Background

3. I live in [REDACTED] Barandon Walk with my husband, Reginald. My children, Elvis and Alison, and Alison's son who is now 11 years old, lived with us at the time of the fire, but have since moved out.
4. I came to the UK from the Caribbean in January 1964 and have lived in West London since settling in London. I initially lived on Lancaster Road but after the birth of our children we needed a larger space and so I spoke to the social worker who helped us to move.
5. I was initially offered the keys to a flat on the fifth floor of Grenfell Tower. However, a social worker contacted me from the town hall and said there was a problem with the structure of the building. I remember they said it was leaning, or something similar. We were offered [REDACTED] Barandon Walk instead and moved

in 1975 when the Estate was brand new. When we moved workers were still working and the electricity was not even fully connected.

6. I thought the Estate was beautiful when we moved in and there was a great community. A lot of people from the West Indies lived in the area, but many have moved out over the years. I know many people who lived in the area. I knew Moses who was from the West Indies. He was always in and out of the walkway. Everyone knew him. I knew Mary Mendy and her daughter, Khadija. Mary was a home carer and she helped to look after my husband Reginald. Mary, Khadija and Moses all sadly passed in the fire.
7. I have been a member of St Clement's Church since I moved to Barandon Walk and I know a lot of the community through Church. I also work as a lunch supervisor at the Fox School in Notting Hill. I like to think of myself as a part of the community.
8. At first, the area and my home was beautiful. To me, the problems seemed to start after the TMO took over.

Lancaster West Residents Association

9. I was a founder member of the Lancaster West Residents' Association in 1977. I started the association with a [REDACTED] man named Eddy, who used to live in Testerton Walk, a man called Rudy [REDACTED] and an [REDACTED] lady named Theresa who lived in Camelford. We fought tooth and nail for the estate.
10. We started the Resident's Association because we needed someone to represent us when we wanted repairs and work doing. I was a board member. We would have monthly meetings with other residents and the Council. I used to go around the Estate and give out leaflets inviting people to come to meetings.
11. At the start, we raised concerns with the Council (RBKC). The meetings continued with the TMO when it was formed in the late 90s. The Chief Executive of the TMO Robert Black would attend. I do think things got worse after the TMO took over and it took longer for repairs to be sorted out.

12. The TMO would sometimes act on the problems and issues we were reporting. We did not expect results to happen in the next week, but progress would not be made even after a couple of weeks. There would sometimes be no progress after six or seven weeks. We would then have to start the whole process over again and the Chair of the Resident's Association would have to chase up on the issues raised.
13. The most common problems people had were with water, leaks and their bathrooms. There were sometimes issues with security in the block and people from Grenfell Tower would complain that people were sleeping rough in the Tower and there was no security.
14. I got the impression that RBKC and the TMO did not want to replace things, despite the fact things were not going to last forever. Bathrooms and kitchens were not replaced often.
15. We felt more listened to through the Resident's Association. As a group, we were listened to more than we were as individuals.
16. I have not continued with the Residents Association since the fire, it became too much for me to deal with. However, the Residents Association is still going strong.

Communications with the TMO/RBKC

17. I had my own problems with the TMO or RBKC, mainly when we wanted some work or repairs to be done in the house. I found that I had to ring them three or four times before anything was done about whatever issue I was reporting. I would call a general number for the town hall and speak to whoever I was put through to. The staff member would tell me that someone would come to fix whatever issue I was reporting and they would make an appointment for a workman to come and look at the issue.
18. In my experience, a worker would show up most of the times I was told they would. However, the TMO would not inform us if someone were unable to turn up when they were due to which wasted a lot of our time. We would have to

call back and raise the issue again. I would always make telephone calls; I did not email or write letters.

19. The problems I would report to the TMO would often be left unresolved. Before the fire, we were having a lot of problems with heating and hot water as the system would often break down or stop working. The workers seemed to come whenever it suited them. They would not fully solve the problem and after a couple of months, it would break again. If it was a bad winter and everyone was turning up the heating, this would seem to cause issues.
20. There have also had problems with water leaks in our flat, both before and after the fire.
21. I now get a monthly booklet that tells me what is going on the estate from Baseline W11 – who are the company now dealing with repairs and other neighbourhood issues. We get letters about work, which is going on, such as with the temporary boiler, but these updates are a completely new thing. We did not get any information like this before the fire.
22. Personally, I have not made any complaints about fire safety. Before the fire at Grenfell, fire safety was not really in the front of my mind. We have always had a fire alarm and there was only one or two small fires in Barandon before which were dealt with quickly and did not affect us.

Module 3 Issues

Health and Safety Barandon Walk

23. RBKC and the TMO did not do enough to safeguard Health and Safety on the Estate before the fire.

Fire alarms

24. We have two fire alarms in our flat, one upstairs in the hallway, and one in the kitchen. I remember these were installed when we first started the Resident's Association in the 1970s. We had to ask RBKC for the fire alarms to be put in. We have never had any problems with the alarms.

25. Our fire alarms still work. Now and again, we get a call to say someone is coming to check the flat and the fire alarms. I think these are people are from the London Fire Brigade. This happened before the fire and continues to happen now. Someone comes once every 6 months or so.

Flat Entrance Door

26. I do not think that the front door I had at the time of the fire was a proper fire door. Although it did shut automatically. It was a pretty door with a bit of glass that did not have any seals. My front door was changed after the fire in around March/April 2018.
27. I understand that the work to our front door was done by Baseline W11 and their contractors. I cannot remember receiving any paperwork at the time to say it was a proper fire door. Although the current door does shut automatically, there are gaps between the door and the frame. I received a letter saying that people will come and replace the current door with a fire door. Workers visited in early December 2019 to come and fix the letterbox on the door, as it was not shutting properly.
28. The doors between the walkways have changed. Now, anyone who lives in Barandon Walk can use their fob to get through. I am not sure if these doors are fire doors. They are left unlocked and at present workers are constantly going through them but they will shut automatically behind you. Sometimes people use heavy objects to prop them open.

Fire Safety Checks and Inspections

29. We have gas checks, electricity and fire alarm checks in our flat. I think the electricity and fire alarms were checked by the London Fire Brigade. This is about every 6 months.
30. Our gas is checked once a year. Those who did the check leave a document to say this has been done. The people who conduct electricity checks do the same.

31. We now have fire wardens who are walking around monitoring for fire hazards. There is someone there 24 hours a day. I have never seen anything like this before the fire. Some people say this makes them feel safer.

Other Safety Features

32. We do not have a fire extinguisher in our flat. There is one in the communal area and as far as I remember that has always been there.
33. There are also fire exit signs that show people how to get out in a fire. There are always lights on outside our flat. I have never had a problem with lighting in Barandon Walk.
34. There have also been fire curtains installed since the fire, some point in 2018. I have heard about these and my understanding is these will shut down in the event of a fire. The flats on the upstairs block have these, but we do not.

Fire Safety Advice, Evacuation and Stay Put

35. I have long known that in the event of a fire you should stay in your flat unless you were being affected by smoke and fire. I knew this as someone told us when we first moved in and from the meetings I had with the Resident's Association. I do not recall getting anything in writing before the fire at Grenfell Tower about stay put policy. It was all verbal communication. We did not receive any leaflets or letters with fire safety information before the fire as far as I remember. I would stay in my flat in the event of a fire unless my flat was affected.
36. Since the fire, I started receiving many leaflets from Baseline W11, Housing Matters and RBKC about what is going on and some of these mention fire safety. We did not get anything like this before. It is as if the fire woke them up. I think now they are doing a good job of keeping us updated.

Module 4 Issues

14th June 2017

37. On the evening of 13 June 2017 I was at home with my husband, my adult daughter Alison, my adult son Elvis, and my grandson.

38. When I first saw the fire it was on the 6th floor, but as I watched it spread so quickly. It was as if the fire was walking up the building. It was a terrible sight.
39. We were evacuated from the flat by the police by 3am. The cladding was blowing all the way over to our block and there was lots of smoke in the air. We were outside in the street until 4am when St Clement's Church opened up.

St Clement's Church

40. On the morning of the 14th June 2017, my daughter Alison called a volunteer from St Clement's church who opened it very quickly to open the building. This was at around 4am. I did not know where else we could have gone apart from the Church at this time.
41. Volunteers started bringing donations to the Church in the morning. It was like a flea market. Companies kept coming and sending food. I remember the Co-op, Marks and Spencer's, Sainsbury's donating food. I think these companies heard about the fire and saw St Clement's was open so brought things to the Church. The Muslim community on Golbourne Road did wonders - they brought food and clothes. The African community sent down so many clothes as well. There was so much food, clothing and toiletries – all in donations. People turned up from everywhere to try to help. I took the donations I needed for myself
42. I was there with other volunteers, making tea and coffee for people. I also helped with sorting through the donations. I do not remember any lists being set up in St Clement's to account for people who were safe and those who were missing.
43. The atmosphere in the church was eerie. Everyone was so sad and shocked. Nobody expected anything like the fire at Grenfell to happen.
44. I think members of the TMO and RBKC came to St Clement's Church on the 14th June and 15th June. I recognised around four or five women who worked in the TMO office at the Church, but there were also others who I did not recognise. I think most of them were wearing lanyards around their necks to

identify themselves as members of the TMO staff. I did not see anyone who was in charge from RBKC or the TMO whilst I was at the Church.

45. The TMO staff who were there seemed to be in a state of shock. They set up tables for people to talk about emergency housing. The staff from the TMO/RBKC arranged hotels for people who had lost their homes and taxis were arranged for some to the hotels.
46. St Clements was open and was busy for the rest of the week. Donations kept arriving and people came continually to collect things that they needed. We did not start to move these donations until we had our service on the Sunday morning – the 18th June. From this time, everything was organised in bags and boxes and we continued to help with donations
47. I know that the Rugby Club, Harrow Club and Methodist Church also opened and offered assistance although I did not go to these myself places myself. St Clement's church and the other churches, mosques and local community groups played a vital role in supporting the community at that time. I did not know there were so many small charities in the area. I think people trusted St Clements as a place they could go and get help in a situation where the authorities were so ineffective. The Church would have always opened in a situation like this and offered support our community.

Accommodation and Returning to Barandon walk

48. On the 14th June 2017, I spent all day at the church. In the evening, we were told that we were not able to stay in our flat in Barandon Walk. There were police stationed outside the entrances. They initially told us that we could not go in at all, but later they agreed that we could return to collect essentials. This was very important, as we needed to get insulin for my husband. My daughter Alison wen to the flat escorted by the police. The police did not give us a reason why we were not able to stay there.
49. At first, we were told we could stay in a local school, Sion Manning School, where they had put up beds. Someone called us to tell us. We went there but the

beds were not suitable – they were like camp beds, so we then went all the way back to the Church by Barandon Walk.

50. Later we were offered a room in the Holiday Inn in Hammersmith, by RBKC. When I was in the church, I received a phone call from someone in the town hall saying to go to the Holiday Inn. They did not offer us travel to get there so we would have had to take a cab. We declined the accommodation – it was too far away and we wanted to stay in Barandon Walk. My son has asthma and so was unable to stay in Barandon Walk; he was placed in a hotel in Chelsea.

51. In the end, on 14 June we stayed at my friend's house in Hurstway Walk. These flats were further away from Grenfell Tower. We stayed there for two nights and then went back to our flat in Barandon Walk on the 16th June. I just walked up and went back to Barandon Walk and back to the flat. The police did not really say anything to us when we went back. I was not given an explanation of why I should not stay in the flat. I simply opened the door and came in.

52. When we were back in the flat, the gas and electricity were working. Other people in my block said they did not have gas and electricity, but this may just be due to way the gas and electricity was set up to run through the Walkway. We had no hot water for nearly a week though and we had to go to the Virgin Gym on Lancaster Road to shower. We were given a token that allowed us to use the shower. They also let us use the swimming pool.

53. There was cladding from the Tower on the balcony of my flat. The cladding was everywhere. No one contacted us about removing it so I threw it off the balcony onto the grass between the Walkways, away from my home. There was also lots of dust and soot in the flat. The council sent someone to clean it up and a few weeks after the fire they cleaned our curtains. We cleaned the windows ourselves.

Relief centres, Basic Provisions and Financial support

54. The main relief centre I visited was St Clements Church although I did also visit the Westway to get food donations a few days after. There was so much food available at the Westway; I will never forget the amount of food. A lot of people

in the Westway looked like they were lost. There were also volunteers giving out money in the Westway. I remember having to go with a passport and a bill to prove you were living on the estate. They gave me £200. My understanding was this money came from charities.

55. As we were allowed back into Barandon Walk by the police to get some things, I was able to access my own clothes and did not get any clothes through donations.

56. I also went to St Clements for counselling. It was available there to everyone who wanted it; I think I went two or three times. It was operated by St Charles Wellbeing Centre.

Support from RBKC

57. I did hear from RBKC after the fire, when they called to offer me a hotel. We also had a key worker from June to August 2017 time. She mostly helped my son, Elvis. The key worker would come here and talk to us, to ask us how we were managing and if everything was alright.

Information and Assistance

58. There was no information circulated about who was missing. I would go out in the area and see people around which confirmed to me that they had survived. My son had many friends in the Tower who he lost. A lot of people from the Caribbean who had lived in the Tower of my generation had moved out, but I still knew people in to Tower who sadly passed.

59. I found out most information through the church community and word of mouth. In the days following the fire, volunteers were walking around and handing out leaflets that told people where to go for help. When things became settled, the Council put up signs around the estate in glass cases, which told people where to go for help. There were also leaflets posted through our door and notices up at Latimer Road station.

Changes since the fire

60. Since the fire, if you go to the office underneath Barandon Walk (Baseline W11), they will send someone to fix the problem quicker than the TMO would have done before the fire. I think they are frightened after what happened, and they are doing a good job now. It is much better than the TMO was. They have started doing works but there is still a lot of work to be done.
61. Before the fire, the TMO were not listening to us. Now, I find people are more helpful and responsive. Baseline W11 are doing things now and listening to us like RBKC and the TMO should have done years ago. It is tragic that the fire had to happen for this sort of change to take place.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

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:



DATE:

23.2.2020