

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF MANUEL MIGUEL FERREIRA ALVES

This statement is limited to those factual issues that the Inquiry wish bereaved, survivor and other residents to address in relation to Module 3 and Module 4. The tragedy on 14 June 2017 has affected me and my family in many ways but I do not wish to go into detail about this in this statement.

I, **MANUEL MIGUEL FERREIRA ALVES**, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. This statement is a factual account of my experience of fire safety in Grenfell Tower ('the Tower') and dealing with the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ('TMO') and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council ('RBKC') (**Module 3**).
2. This statement will also provide a brief factual account of my experience in the aftermath of the fire ('the fire') at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 (**Module 4**).
3. I provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 2 June 2018 (: **IWS00000538**) for the purpose of Phase 1. I also provided three witness statements to the Metropolitan Police Service dated 26 June 2017, 8 November 2017 and 20 January 2018 respectively.

Introduction

4. In the days following the fire, I was happy to be alive and felt supported by my friends but I did not feel support from the Council or the Police. It was complete chaos around me. I did not see anyone from the Police, TMO or RBKC directing us to where we could get assistance. We had nothing; we needed somewhere to live, food, clothes, and money. No one from any government body had asked us to do a medical check or checked if we had any special needs.
5. I had to find things myself; luckily, I had good friends who bought us essential items but they only had to do so because the State did not step in and help. I would have expected something like that in a small village in an undeveloped country but not in West London. The State should not be relying on friends, family and neighbours to provide victims with the support that the State should be giving.

Background

6. My family moved in to flat 105 of Grenfell Tower on the 13th February 1998 and we bought our flat in May 2001 for £82,000 under the right to buy scheme. Flat 105 was a large two-bedroom flat on the North face of the Tower. The flat was on what was the 10th floor of Grenfell Tower prior to the 2012 to 2016 refurbishment ('the refurbishment') and then the 13th floor after the new flats were built.
7. I lived in flat 105 with my wife, Fatima, my son, Tiago and daughter, Ines. At the time of the fire, my son was studying for an undergraduate degree in Physics at Kings College London and my daughter was preparing to sit her GCSEs.
8. On becoming a leaseholder, I sought permission to divide my living room and created a further bedroom within the flat. I exhibited a plan of the flat to my first Witness Statement as **Exhibit MMFA/1 (IWS00000536)**.

Communication with the TMO and RBKC

Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association's (GT LA) dealings with the TMO/RBKC

9. For years, I would attend meetings held by the Lancaster West Residents Association and the Grenfell Compact to get information about what was happening in the local area. Although I found the meetings useful, as there were many people involved with the groups my voice would get lost. The Residents Association represented the whole of the Estate, not just the Tower so what they did was more generalised. Many of those involved with the Grenfell Compact, including its leaders were tenants not leaseholders, their interest were different from mine.
10. From around 2008/2009 the leaseholders in the Tower started meeting informally to discuss issues that were specific to us as leaseholders. We were all having difficulty in getting the TMO to respond seriously to our concerns regarding safety in the Tower and the expensive communal heating system.
11. In late 2010, after an incident of fire in the Tower on 30th April 2010, Shah Ahmed suggested that we should organise ourselves into a leaseholders association. We all agreed that we might have a better chance of getting the TMO and RBKC to listen to us as a group. For years; we had dealt with them as individuals without much luck. Our main objective was to get the TMO to do more about fire safety in the Tower. A secondary objective was to try to get a reduction in the service charge, which was inflated by the lack of meter for the communal heating system.
12. The membership of the GTLA changed over the years as people moved in and out of the Tower but initially it included myself, Shah Ahmed, Tunde Awoderu, Nick Burton, Shanti Patel, Taye Kabede and Keith Mott. We needed a structure so Shah as the founder of the group was appointed as Chairman, Tunde as Vice Chairman/Treasurer and Keith Mott as Secretary. They were the leading figures in the group. When Keith moved out of the building, I took over the role of Secretary for about 2 years until 28 March 2014.
13. When we first set up the GTLA, we met every Wednesday at a local pub, the Garden Bar. However, because we all had family and work commitments, after the GTLA was fully set-up we really only met once a month. We met more regularly when we had an ongoing issue or correspondence with the TMO.

14. The GTLA was Shah's project and he did most of the work including the legal research and drafting correspondence. However, we all knew the issues that we were raising with the TMO were important, so we were happy to give up our time to attend meetings and try to affect some change. We also occasionally paid in money to the GTLA whenever it was needed, for example, I contributed £300 to instruct a Solicitor to draft a letter to the TMO.
15. We were successful in getting RBKC and the TMO to recognise us as a residents group. However, when Mark Anderson of the TMO started doubting our legitimacy (**Exhibit MMFA/4**) we decided to draw up a formal constitution. I only had a paper copy of the constitution, which was unfortunately lost in the fire.
16. When we contacted the TMO or RBKC, we usually copied in our local Councillors such as Judith Blakeman, as well as all the relevant people in the local Council. We wanted to make sure that a third party also had a record of the concerns we raised with the TMO. We quickly learnt that the TMO would respond more quickly and professionally to the emails where Councillors were copied in.
17. We had years of experience dealing with the TMO and knew that it was better to write directly to those in charge, there was no point in going to the middle man who couldn't make any decisions.
18. Some of the staff at the TMO took us more seriously than others did. In early-2014 Siobhan Rumble, Neighbourhood Manager, told me directly that she had better things to do than read emails from the GTLA. We wrote to Robert Black (CEO of the TMO) about this on 2 February 2014 (**Exhibit MMFA/5**).
19. From the beginning of the 2012-2016 refurbishment project, the GTLA made it clear to the TMO that we didn't want to have to pay for the refurbishments. We felt that it was their neglect that caused the need for the refurbishments in the first place.
20. We were successful in reducing our annual service charge from around £2,000 per household in 2012/2013 to approximately £1,000 following the removal of the concierge service in the Tower (see **Exhibit MMFA/6** which is the Service

Charge final Account for 2012/2013 and **Exhibit MMFA/7** which is the Service Charge Estimate for the Financial Year 2014 - 2015). We were happy to pay a small service charge for the communal areas, but we didn't want to have to pay a huge amount for the refurbishment. We also felt aggrieved by the fact that for decades we had been forced to pay for central heating during the summer and when we were not using it, just because they had an old system installed that couldn't even give you an exact meter reading.

21. We were worried that we would be given a huge bill for the refurbishments. As the GTLA we were very aware of our legal rights, we checked every small detail of the law and knew that without a s20 consultation letter the maximum the TMO could charge us was £250. We knew this so we were confident that they wouldn't be able to charge us. They sent leaseholders letters in June 2012 (**Exhibit MMFA/8**) telling us that the planning application had been submitted but it didn't mention the s20 consultation. It was not until October 2012 that the TMO confirmed that there will be no recharge of any of the costs of the refurbishment to leaseholders (**Exhibit MMFA/9**).
22. As a GTLA member's wife, had been directly affected by a fire, which had occurred in the Tower on 30th April 2010, we had copies of the report following the investigation into that fire. The GTLA as a whole was concerned about fire safety and had this in mind when discussing the refurbishments with the TMO. We were aware in particular of smoke having travelled up the building during that fire in April 2010. We asked for the fire safety to be considered during the refurbishments and accounted for in the budget. The TMO ignored our reports of the worries and issues we had about smoke, fire, doors and alarms.
23. We wanted an independent Health and Safety Assessor to attend and inspect the building, we were willing to pay for this but thought that it was only fair for the TMO to do so too and we asked Councillor Blakeman for her support (**MMFA/10**).
24. On the 21 April 2017, just two months before the fire, the GTLA wrote to Laura Johnson (RBKC) and Sacha Jevans (TMO) requesting a fire safety inspection following a mandate from the Tower residents. 90% of residents having signed our petition

requesting that the TMO implement changes (**Exhibit MAFA/11**). We were concerned about safety at the Tower including gas leaks and constant noises which we thought might be related to loose cladding.

25. The GTLA we tried to open the eyes of the TMO and the Council about fire safety in the Tower. If they listened to us maybe, something could have been different.

Personal communication with the TMO

26. There were many occasions, before and after the GTLA was formed, where I would communicate with the TMO directly. My son Tiago Alves would assist me in preparing the letters since he was about 11 years old as his English was much better than mine was.
27. If I wanted to report something, which needed repairing, I would usually call the TMO. But if there was something I wanted more information on or which I wanted to raise as a point of concern, I would put this in writing.
28. As a leaseholder, I dealt with repairs in my flat by myself. So it was only when there were structural issues that I would call the TMO, such as a leak, the hot water being off or issues with things in the communal parts of the Tower.
29. The TMO never responded promptly. Depending on the day of the week, we would have to chase the TMO three or four times before anything was done. Based on my years of dealing with the TMO, I believe that some members of staff were more honest than others. Some were happy to tell you a lie just to get you off the phone.
30. We had a lot of issues with hot water in the Tower, both before and after the refurbishment. Before the refurbishment, we would notice when the water was getting cooler and we would immediately report it to the TMO. Because there was a hot water tank in our kitchen, we had a reserve of hot water, which would keep us going until someone from the TMO came out to turn the boiler on. After the refurbishment, when the boiler was off that was it, no hot water.

31. After the refurbishment, the hot water would go off at least once every two months. We would call the emergency repair number to report it, but it would take them a long time to fix it. Because the new heating system was not common, it needed a specialist plumber to turn it back on which caused delays.
32. My letters to the TMO were often requests for more information such as a breakdown of our service charges. On one occasion, the leaseholders were handed a £19,000 bill for the refurbishment of the playground near the Tower. The playground was in good condition and didn't need to be refurbished. I suspected that we had been misled so I requested the breakdown and saw that the actual cost to the TMO was only around £200 per leaseholder.
33. The TMO were careless in managing expenses, costs were then passed on to leaseholders. For example, on one occasion, they claimed that it costs them £180 to change lights in the communal area. The reason it cost them that much was because instead of sending out someone immediately when the issue was reported to them, they waited until it was night to send someone out who would then charge double the usual hourly rate. The TMO would claim that it was necessary for health and safety reasons. I wrote to the TMO about this issue on 2 December 2013 and they responded on 20 December 2013 (**Exhibit MMFA/12**). I raised a similar issue again in January 2015 (**Exhibit MMFA/13**).
34. I also wrote to Siobhan Rumble, TMO Neighbourhood Manager in 2014 about fire safety (**Exhibit MMFA/14**). Children had been setting off fire alarms but no emergency services would arrive. I was concerned that in a real emergency the LFB would not respond quickly enough. I was also concerned that when the emergency services did arrive, they would have nowhere to park as there were often cars parked on double lines in front of the Tower, which I felt was a dangerous hazard.
35. When I wrote to Siobhan Rumble, as an individual, she was often very rude. She was slow to respond to emails and complaints but if she wanted something from you, she would not wait. For example, I was once a few days late in paying for my garage space, but rather than sending me a notice, she immediately put a lock on the garage despite the contract stating that she should.

36. During GTLA 's meetings with the TMO sometime in late 2011/early-2012, we started putting a lot of pressure on them to improve the Tower.
37. The first time I heard that RBKC planned to refurbish Grenfell Tower, was in early 2012 during a meeting in the community room in the Tower. The meeting was led by a man from the Council, I cannot recall his name and was attended by several residents, not just leaseholder. We were told that they had already prepared the designs for the Tower but we weren't given exact details of what work they will be carrying out.
38. Most of the residents in Grenfell Tower wanted the refurbishments because they felt that they had been neglected by RBKC for many years. The main complaint was the large heating bills, which were a result of the communal boilers not having a meter. No one could believe that it was the 21st century and we weren't able to pay just for the energy we used. We had to pay for heating even when we didn't use it and even in the summer because the boiler still had to be kept on 24 hours a day to heats the water. We paid the same for heating in December as we would in June.
39. As the communal boiler was constantly on, the flats in the Tower were usually very warm. This was true even in the summer when the radiators were off, because the hot water pipes ran underneath our floorboards and gave off a lot of heat. As a leaseholder, I was lucky because I knew where the valve for the pipes was located so I was able to turn it off during the warmer months. Many of my neighbours probably wouldn't have known where the valve was, so I imagine their flats were very stuffy during the summer.
40. Despite the large heating bills, the water in our flat was never too hot we were able to turn on the hot water tap and use it without having to mix in any cold water. The water pressure in the flat was also very weak, too weak even to have a shower. We were forced to fill up the bathtub and have a bath every time we wanted to wash.
41. We had several meetings with the TMO before the refurbishment works began. Councillor Judith Blakeman also attended most of the meetings, but she did not take an active role. At one of the first meetings, I raised the issue of residents throwing rubbish

from their windows. I was concerned for the safety of those walking around the Tower, especially children who might have things accidentally dropped on them. My concerns were shared by many of the other residents and we made it clear to the Council that they needed to include a canopy in the designs for the exterior refurbishment of the Tower.

42. We raised the issue of the canopy at almost all of the meetings with the TMO. We said that we needed a canopy around the Tower to keep people safe. We were told that the architects already had a design and didn't want to change it. They said that a canopy wouldn't look good. I warned the TMO that it would be their responsibility if something went wrong, because I have already warned them it wasn't safe for the Tower to be left without a canopy. But they didn't care, they were more concerned about the building looking nice.
43. When they started the construction work, I gave the contractors access to my flat because I wanted it done as soon as possible. My flat was one of the first to be refurbished. I believe that the TMO were pleased that I gave them access without any trouble, and they hoped it would encourage other residents to do the same. I believe that because of that, the quality of work in my flat might have been better than in others. They started work in my flat on 28 May 2015 and it took two or three days. They changed the heating tanks and radiators first, and they came back in July to change the windows.
44. I would leave home early in the morning to go to work and would return after the workers had left, so I was not home when they were carrying out the work in my flat. But another member of my family would have always been there.
45. There was a show flat on 14th floor of the Tower, which was supposed to give us an idea of the kind of work that was going to be done in our flats. I visited the show room on more than one occasion. I told the contractors that I wanted a few bits and pieces to be done differently in my flat. For example, I wanted two small radiators instead of a large one; they were good about it and were happy to make those adjustments.
46. As my flat was one of the first to be refurbished, the new heating system was put in my hallway, on top of the electricity fuse box. It looked so ugly. I was concerned that if

there were a leak from the tank, it would drip into the electricity box, which would have been dangerous. I asked if it could be placed in the kitchen instead but it wasn't even an option at the time. I just wanted them to get the works done as soon as possible, so I agreed and didn't restrict access.

47. The residents had a few meetings throughout the refurbishment period in the downstairs community room. People were fighting not to have the boilers installed near their front doors, and eventually the TMO agreed that the boilers could be installed in the kitchens. By that time, mine had already been installed in our hallway.
48. They lowered the ceiling in the lobby outside my flat, in order to cover up all the pipes. They also built a large cupboard on the wall opposite the lifts, to cover the pipes that went up in between each floor of the Tower. It reduced the space in the lobby and made it very narrow. It felt more claustrophobic. I didn't like it but I understood they needed to do it so I accepted it.
49. The windows in my flat were changed in July 2015. After the new windows were installed, I could hear my neighbours upstairs. We had lived in the flat for years and before the new windows were fitted, we never heard anything. I believe that during the refurbishments, they created a small gap between the different floors of the Tower near the windows and because of that, we could hear our neighbours.
50. They also installed new extractor fans in the kitchen window. We noticed that it was making a lot of noise, so we called the TMO. Someone came to look at it, I believe that they were from Rydon or one of their sub-contractors. They just told us that it was normal for it to be that noisy.
51. The refurbishment caused some disturbance for the residents. We couldn't enter and exit the Tower on the ground level. We had to use the walkway level, which made it difficult when we took shopping upstairs because you had to use the stairs.
52. The workers were drilling holes between the floors to run the new pipes through, which created a lot of dust. I didn't see the workers because I was at work during the day, but when I get home there was dust everywhere. My wife had to spend a lot of time cleaning the communal areas because the workers did not.

53. It also became annoying to use the lifts during the refurbishment. The workers used to hold the lifts to carry their equipment up and down, which meant that often they were not available for the residents, so we were forced to use the stairs. Also, because the lifts were used a lot during that time and they were not meant for heavy duty use, they broke down more often.
54. Although I didn't personally see them installing the new ventilation system, I noticed a difference. I started to hear a different louder noise coming from the system, before the refurbishment it used to have one pipe to suck and another to blow air. I think they swapped it around during the refurbishment, so one was sucking and the other was blowing air into the lobby. It looked like they changed the direction the blades pointed and you could hear the difference. I assumed that because it was a new system, it was working properly. I thought that the fact you could hear it was a good sign. I assumed that because we couldn't hear the previous system, it must have been broken. The temperature in the lobby was consistent because of the concrete.

Fire safety

55. I was never given any verbal fire safety advice from the Council or the TMO. I was not informed of the escape route out the building. I was not told where the assembly point for the Tower was if there was an evacuation.
56. The lifts in the Tower were changed in or around 2005, the old lifts used to breakdown almost every day. After they replaced the lifts, they were bigger but because the new system was computerised, there were issues almost every week. Sometimes, it would be days before the lifts were fixed. We would be told by the TMO that it was because they were waiting for parts to arrive. It was only when both lifts were out of service that they would consider it an emergency. As we lived on the 13th floor, it was difficult to use the stairs, but when the lifts were out, we had no option.
57. On the night of the fire, I knew to leave the building through the stairs and not to use the lifts. It was not something that I had been advised on, but instinct. A silver lining to

the lifts constantly being out of service, was that I had a lot of practice exiting the building through the stairwell, so on the night of the fire I knew the route well.

58. I knew from personal experience that you shouldn't use the lifts in a fire. Before the refurbishment of the Tower, there was a sign opposite the lifts telling you to evacuate in a fire. I cannot remember the exact wording but it was something to that effect. Since preparing my Phase 1 statement, I have remembered that at some point after the refurbishment, a sign was put up near the lifts, it said to "stay-put" in a fire. I thought it was a bit weird because the signs in other buildings I've been in, like at work, say to evacuate, as did the old sign in the Tower, so I didn't pay much attention to it.
59. The sign was in English and there were a lot of people who lived in the Tower who did not read or speak English. I do not remember the Council or TMO giving us the "stay-put" information in any other format. On the 14 June 2017, my instinct was to leave the building.
60. At some point before the fire, I can't recall when, someone from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) came to our flat and gave my wife a smoke alarm to install. That was the only occasion that I am aware of, that someone from the fire brigade or anyone official visited our flat and the Tower in relation to fire safety. I am not aware of any other fire safety checks or assessments having been carried out in the Tower.
61. The doors in the communal parts of the Tower leading to the stairwell and to the rubbish chute were heavy and would automatically close behind you. I believe they were fire resistant.
62. I cannot clearly remember, but I don't believe that there were any emergency exit signs in the Tower.
63. I know there was emergency lighting because when the power was out, the emergency lighting in the communal parts would come on, but I do not know if they were working on the 14 June 2017.
64. I believe that before the refurbishment of the Tower, there was a fire alarm system in the communal parts of the building. There were a couple of occasions in early-2014, when children would break the glass to the small red emergency alarm boxes. When

this happened I would hear the alarm in the communal part of the Tower, it would make a really loud noise and would call the fire brigade, I think the system had a direct link to the fire brigade. I noticed that when it was on you could hear the ventilation come on. I reported my concerns about the children setting off the fire alarm and other fire safety issue in a complaint to Siobhan Rumble (Neighbourhood Manager) of the TMO on 28 April 2014. I don't remember receiving a response to my complaint despite chasing on 22 May 2014 (**Exhibit MMFA/15**).

65. I can't be sure but I believe I heard an alarm go off in the communal area of the Tower just after they finished the refurbishment and Rydon left site. I don't remember hearing it go off at any other point after the refurbishment and I didn't hear it go off on the 14 June 2017.
66. There was an occasion after the refurbishment, when I was exiting the building and I noticed that the ventilation system had come on. I could hear a sucking or blowing noise coming from on top of the main entrance door. The hot water was off that day. I believe that the ventilator turning on was what turned off the hot water. I spoke to someone from the fire brigade who had attended the Tower that that day. I think they told me that the ventilation system was triggered by someone smoking in the lobby, and that when it comes on, it automatically shuts off the hot water system.
67. During the refurbishment, they closed off an entire section of the Tower because of a gas leak; I think it was the side of the Tower with flats ending in '2'.
68. I think there was a tenant handbook, which might have included fire safety information, but if it did, no one ever flagged it to us. I was also aware of the TMO's 'LINK' magazine for the Lancaster West Estate; again, no one ever told us that it might include any important information. Fire safety information and safety in general, shouldn't be something which is buried in several pages of books or magazines, it should be made very clear and easily accessible to all residents.

Aftermath

69. On the night of 14 June 2017, I left the Tower in noting other than the clothes I had on, without my wallet, and ID, thankfully I left my mobile phone in the car. My family and

I, eventually made our way to our friend Filipe Mato's home, he lived in Bramley House. We stayed with them for several days after the fire, until we were finally placed in a hotel by RBKC. Our friend's balcony looked straight on to Grenfell Tower and we spent the rest of the night watching the fire spreading and destroying the Tower, praying that everyone got out. I was horrified. I never even thought about the RBKC at that point, but the council was not visible on that night.

70. I was so emotionally distraught watching the fire, that I didn't have the courage to keep calling my friend Marcio Gomez who was in Flat 183 with his wife who was 8 months pregnant. I first got to know Marcio in 2015, we would run into each other in the lift and started talking. I felt a connection to him because we were both Portuguese so I invited him to play football with my friends and I so we could get to know each other better. We played football together almost every Tuesday and quickly became friends. My wife and I also got to know Marcio's wife, Andreia. We also used to see each other outside of the local area, at Portuguese restaurants, which both our families frequented.
71. As I stated in my Phase 1 statement, I had called him earlier to tell him to get out of the Tower as it was on fire. Marcio told me that he knew the Tower was on fire but he could not get out because there was already smoke outside his front door and it would be too difficult for his wife to walk. I kept telling him in Portuguese that if they stayed, they would die.
72. I was too scared to find out if they had made it out so I could not call again. Thankfully after speaking to our Catholic Priest my wife convinced me to call Marcio again, so I did, but there was no answer. I was terrified, I thought they had died. The next morning I ran into someone from our local Portuguese community, they told me that Marcio and Andreia had not made it out of the Tower. I was devastated my wife was also heartbroken, our worst fear had become a reality.
73. Later that afternoon, I received a call from someone at the Portuguese Consult. We were registered with the Consult so they knew where we lived and called to make sure that our family was safe. I asked the Consult staff member if they had any information about Marcia and Andreia, I was hoping that the person I spoke to earlier had made a mistake. The Consult staff member told me that both Marcio and Andreia had made it out of the Tower and were in hospital. I was very grateful to hear this. However, I was

concerned to learn that they were both in commas. We were later devastated to hear the news that Andreia had lost the baby.

Relief Centres

Day 1 – Notting Hill Methodist Church

74. I did not sleep that night. In the afternoon, I heard from one of my children that there were donated clothes available in the Methodist Church. I believe that they were getting information from social media. I only had the clothes I was wearing when I left the Tower and they smelt of smoke. I needed to have a shower and to change my clothes so I went to the Methodist Church with Ines and Filipe.
75. There were debris from the Tower everywhere you looked, a mixture of black ash and some pieces of debris as big as 10cm. The debris had spread as far as the Methodist Church and my friend Filipe's balcony. I believe that they cleaned the debris themselves as no one from RBKC did.
76. When we arrived at the Church, we found bags full of donations on top of each other. No one had sorted them so we had to go through the bags ourselves. I could not find anything my size.
77. There was no one official at the Church, no one from RBKC or the government, just the people who worked there and volunteers.
78. The Methodist Church was the closest centre in the community to Grenfell Tower. RBKC and the TMO should have known that it was likely to be the first place residents would go. They should have been there to direct us. Their staff should have been there to assist residents and to help sort the donations.

Day 2 - Rugby Portobello Club

79. I believe that it was the next day that I went to Rugby Portobello Club, having heard from Dorinda Suarez-Chans, who lived Flat 103, that they were assisting Tower

residents. I was familiar with the Rugby Portobello Club because it was where our Catholic Portuguese Community had our Christmas parties.

80. When I arrived at the Rugby Portobello Club, I saw that they had a board on the wall with two pieces of brown paper on it. We were asked to write our names and flat numbers on the list. Other survivors from the Tower had started the list; we were all worried about our neighbours and just wanted to see who made it out. This was not an official list and was not put together by RBKC or Police.
81. There were also clothes and food available at the Rugby Portobello. This had been provided by charities and volunteers from the local area. The local government was not there.
82. I attended the Rugby Portobello Club many times in the first few days after the fire, to meet with other survivors. It was filled with a mixture of emotions, there was a lot of confusion and uncertainty, people were crying, others were looking for information about their loved ones, but there was also a sense that we were all in the same boat. We tried to comfort and support each other and the situation brought us closer to our neighbours.

Day 3 - Westway Sports Centre

83. We started to hear from others in the community that there was some help available at the Westway Sports Centre. When we went to the Westway, there was simply confusion everywhere. There were lots of people around but I do not remember anyone making it clear that they were from the Council. We had to give our names and flat number at the door and show a form of identification, but because most people did not have any, they would just take your word.
84. We were still staying with our friends in their home but on either the Saturday/Sunday after the fire; we began to feel that it was not fair on our friends to have all four of us disturbing their lives. Especially as we had a lot of guests during those first couple of days coming to check on us. I was also afraid that we would be forgotten about by RBKC.

85. I did not have any money other than the small amount of cash a friend had given me so that I could have some money in my pocket. So I did not have enough money to book my family a hotel room. I also did not have any ID to be able to withdraw money from my bank account. I knew from past experience that my bank would not let me withdraw any money without documentation.
86. The daughter of one of our friends lived in a flat on Latimer Road, she offered to move out and stay with her parents so we could move into her flat. I did not feel right to move her out of her home, and I was also concerned that if she left her flat for us she might get in trouble for letting us stay there, so we didn't want to stay there for long.
87. We decided to go to the Westway to try to make contact with someone who could find a place for us to stay. It was chaos. It was very distressing to see people sleeping at the Westway, many were just sleeping on mattresses in the tennis courts, it was like a refugee camp. It damaged me to see that. I did not ask for temporary accommodation during that visit because I did not want to put my family through that. We were still in shock. I knew that my family and I were more comfortable staying with our friends than on mattresses in a public space. I also did not know RBKC were putting people up in hotels. I felt fortunate that we had good friends to support us.
88. At the Westway I tried to look for someone from RBKC. This was not easy because they did not make themselves known. Finally, I found someone from the Council and I told them that my family needed somewhere to stay and asked to be put up in a hotel.
89. There were also several charities based in the Westway providing financial support. About a week after the fire, we received between £300 to £500, from charities, which was very helpful during those early days.

Accommodation

Hilton London Metropole, Paddington

90. The person from the Council at the Westway told us to go to the Hilton London Metropole Hotel in Paddington. They did not offer us transport there; luckily we were

able to rely on our friends for lifts. My employer had also allowed me to use her car as mine was locked in the garage near the Tower and I could not access it.

91. When we arrived at the Hilton, we discovered that we had been allocated one room with two double beds for all four of us. It was completely unsuitable, especially as they knew that my children were young adults; They had also only offered us a two-night stay, so we decided not to sleep there because it would have been too disruptive for our family at what was already a very unsettled time.

92. Two days later, we went back to the Westway, and asked them for another hotel. We were offered rooms in the Holiday Inn hotel, Earls Court.

Holiday Inn Hotel, Earls Court

93. On the 20 June 2017, Fatima and Ines went to the Holiday Inn Hotel ahead of us, to check us in; they were told by staff that there were no rooms reserved for us. She tried to explain our situation but the staff were very rude to her. At this point, it was already 7pm, so the Council office was closed, and we had not been given an out of hours contact number, so we went back to stay with our friends.

94. The next day we went back to the Westway and spoke to the person from RBKC who had sent us to the Holiday Inn hotel. He realised that they had made a mistake and the booking was for that night and not the day before. They did not tell us how long we could be stay there; we were never given any information about how long we would be able to stay there.

95. We went back to the Holiday Inn that night. We were given two rooms but the rooms only had double beds. This meant that Tiago and Ines had to share a bed. At first, we were just happy to have somewhere to stay so we did not complain. After a few days, we made several complaints that the room was not suitable. It took three weeks for the double bed in their room to be replaced with two single beds. The rooms were standard hotel rooms, they did not feel like home and were not set-up for long term stays. There was no privacy in the hotels, if friends came to visit us, we had to meet them in the lobby, there was nowhere private for us to go.

96. Around September 2017, we asked for a third room because Ines started school and she and Tiago had different schedules. When Ines wanted to sleep Tiago wanted to stay awake, when she wanted to study he wanted to sleep. They agreed to provide Tiago with a separate room, but this should have happened months earlier.
97. Life in the hotel was not easy. I need stability in my life and at that time, I had none. Not only were we stuck in a small place we did not have facilities to cook for ourselves or to do our own laundry. For at least the first month after the fire, only breakfast was included in our hotel stay. We kept asking where we were supposed to get our lunch and dinner but they did not tell us. Luckily, we had good friends, so for the first couple of weeks after the fire we had a cooked meal every night with different friends at their homes. We used the money that we had received from charities at the Westway to buy lunch. It was only after a couple of weeks that RBKC started giving us £300 a week for our food expenses.
98. I felt pressure to go back to work. At the time, it was not clear if RBKC would make us offers for our loss of property. I knew that, as a leaseholder, I would have to apply for a mortgage for a new property and would have to produce evidence of earnings without which I would not be able to secure a mortgage. Psychological Support

Leaseholders

99. For weeks after the fire, the leaseholders did not know what our position was. Unlike tenants we had a mortgage to pay and the fire did not change this. We heard that the tenants would be getting new flats, but no information was given to the leaseholders. As a leaseholder, my situation was very different. I had a lease that referred to rebuilding after a fire but that did not seem practical. If I was paid the value of the lease it would mean I would be unable to buy anywhere comparable in the area as the sums paid for tower block flats are not that high. It would mean my family and I would probably have to leave London. In addition given my age I did not know if I could get another mortgage or how much I could realistically pay. I was homeless, in debt with my mortgage and had no idea where I would live or be able to live. The uncertainty made me anxious and caused additional stress. I felt betrayed by the council. It was not until mid-July 2017 that we finally could even meet anyone official.

100. The first meeting was in early-July 2017, at a hotel in South Kensington with a Minister I also assume that someone from RBKC was there. They started to tell us that they would give us a flat, which was more valuable than the one we had in the Tower. I said that I did not want this. I did not want to be a council tenant and had worked hard to buy my own property. I wanted to help my family be independent and becoming a council tenant was something I left behind many years earlier. It was not our fault that we lost our homes. The council brought in a 'consultant' called Tony Hutchinson to discuss with us on behalf of RBKC.
101. I, and other occupying leaseholders had significant concerns that did not apply to tenants. All had been made homeless by the fire but I was conscious of the particular problems me and my family now faced: The obligation to pay the mortgage continued; if we stopped paying our credit score would be effected making it harder to get a further loan. If we could not work, there was a risk that pay would be reduced and it would become harder to obtain another mortgage as income levels would appear lower to a mortgage lender. There was also a real risk we would not be able to remain as homeowners. I had struggled for years to obtain my own property and wanted something to pass to my family. Given my age, starting again would be very difficult, if not impossible. I realised that the Council may 'buy back' the lease but this would not in any way place me back in the situation I had come from. Everything I worked for was lost. The stress, and uncertainty was acute.
102. RBKC kept telling us that their insurers would determine the value of our flats. We made it clear to them that because of the circumstance, it was more than a financial decision. It was a political decision. It was only in late-August 2017 that we were given offers for loss of property.
103. We continued to negotiate throughout September 2017. At the end of September they made us a better offer. The Council were also trying to divide the leaseholders and put a lot of pressure on us. I feel that because I was speaking on behalf of some the leaseholders, I was punished; my flat was valued as a two bedroom instead of three. I was emotionally exhausted so I accepted their offer I did not feel any empathy from RBKC about the fact that I was homeless and traumatised.

104. The negotiations with the council added to my anxiety. I was already dealing with nightmares and sleepless nights because of the fire
105. We moved into temporary accommodation at the end of October 2017. We signed a rolling weekly non-secure tenancy agreement that could be bought to an end by either us or RBKC with 4 weeks' notice. Although we had the offer from RBKC, I still needed to look for a suitable property. It took me a few months for us to buy a property; so we were in temporary accommodation for 8 months.

Psychological Support

106. As this statement is made for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, it will become a public document, I do not feel comfortable going into detail about the full extent of how the fire on the 14 June 2017 affected my family and I. However, I will say that after the fire I was completely distraught. I was concerned about the safety of our friends and neighbours, praying that they had all made it out alive. It was devastating to lose so many of our neighbours in the fire. I also lost everything, in the fire our entire documentary history as a family was in that flat including our wedding album and baby photos of Ines and Tiago, all of which are irreplaceable. Tiago was a baby when we first moved in to Grenfell Tower and Ines was born there. All of our memories as a family were in that flat.
107. In the days following the fire, we knew that if there were people still missing it was because they had not made it out of the Tower.
108. The emotional stress and uncertainty of not knowing who had made it out of the Tower safely and the horror of what we witnessed on 14 June 2017 put a strain on our family unit and my marriage.
109. I was really struggling to cope, but I felt that I had to stay strong for my family and for the other leaseholders. In late 2017, I was doing an interview and the journalist interviewing me noticed that there was a delay in my response time. He told me that he had been kidnapped in Syria and his colleagues were killed; initially he thought that he did not need any help because he was lucky to be alive. That was how I felt. The journalist recommended that I start going to counselling and he personally put me in

touch with an NHS counsellor at St Charles Hospital. I started counselling sessions in November/December 2017. I was diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. I continue to attend weekly counselling sessions.

110. My wife, Fatima, also suffered injuries caused by the trauma she experienced.

Coordination and Leadership

111. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, the TMO, RBKC and Central government were nowhere to be seen. There was a vacuum so the bereaved, survivors and residents had to group together and create our own support system.

112. I had known, Shahin Sadafi and Ed Daffarn by sight before the fire. I knew they were involved with the Grenfell Compact. I met them at the Rugby Portobello Club after the fire and I gave them my number, we then started a WhatsApp group, to which other survivors and bereaved were added. We, as survivors, organised our own register; identifying those who were missing was our first concern. I suggested that each floor in the Tower should have a representative who knew the people on their floor and that person would be in charge of updating the register for their floor. The Rugby Portobello became the place where the survivors would meet. That was the start of what would become Grenfell United.

113. We had several meetings in the weeks following the fire, initially at the Rugby Portobello, then at the Royal Garden Hotel and other places. Several private organisations offered us free use of their offices; for example, Universal Studios offered us use of their boardroom.

114. The first of those meetings was on Friday, 16 June 2017. About 20 people attended the meeting. We knew that providing support to each other was the most important thing at the time. I tried to help as much as I could. Willy Thompson was present when we first met at the Rugby Portobello Club; a while later he was the one to suggest the name Grenfell United.

115. On either the 16 or 17 of June 2017, a few of us, including Shahin and I met with Father Oliver McTernan and his assistant Jordan at the Clement's James Centre.

Father Oliver used to be the Priest at St Francis of Assisi Church, one of our local Churches. My children, Tiago and Ines both went to St Francis of Assisi Primary School, which was the affiliated primary school. I was familiar with Clement James Centre because they used to run a homework club for the children in the local area, which Ines and Tiago attended.

116. We told Father Oliver of the intention of the bereaved, survivors and residents of Grenfell Tower, to stick together. Shahin proposed that we deal with the Government and others as a single group. Father Oliver went on to assist us in setting up Grenfell United as a formal body. During our conversation at the Clement James Centre, a man approached us; he introduced himself as Ibrahim El-Noor and said that he had lost his aunt in the fire. There was a lot of confusion at that time and no clear information about who had died in the Tower, so we took him at his word. We had no reason not to believe him. He said that he wanted us all to form a single group and to work together.

117. On the morning of 20 June, my wife received a call telling us to go to the Clement James Centre for a meeting with other survivors. When we arrived, there were a few celebrities present including Adele, Marcus Mumford, Sam Smith and Dave. It was a private meeting; the government were not involved in organising it. We all spoke about our experience on 14 June 2017 and about how we had survived. We were told that the celebrities were there to help us. They proposed organising a concert to raise funds for us, similar to that for the victims of the Manchester Arena attack a few weeks earlier. We felt that it was not the right time for such an event, given that it was only a few days after such a terrible tragedy and it was still not clear how many had died.

118. At the end of that meeting with the celebrities, Nick Burton asked me to follow him somewhere, he said that he could not tell me where. I went with him and another neighbour from our Estate, Simon Jolly, to a building opposite Latimer Road tube station. When we arrived, I quickly realised the reason for all of the secrecy: we were meeting with Theresa May. A couple of other survivors were also present. Theresa May listened to our concerns and promised to take action.

119. The following day, 21 June 2017, the other survivors from the meeting and I were invited by the Prime Minister's office to attend the House of Commons and hear Theresa May make a statement about the fire. I attended and I was very pleased to hear

her mention all of the points that we had raised during our meeting. She apologised for the Government's response in the aftermath. She also promised that we would all be rehoused within 3 weeks. Because Theresa May seemed to have listened to us, I had hope that the Government was going to step-up and help us.

120. A few days after Theresa May's statement, we had a meeting with Gold Command. At the meeting, the official introduced Ibrahim El-Noor to us as someone who had lost his aunt in the Tower and told us to work with him. I remembered that I had met him at the Clement James Centre a few days earlier, but he now seemed to have the backing of the government.

121. Although I was not present, I heard from others that at a meeting of survivors, which was held a few days after the meeting with Gold Command, Ibrahim El-Noor proposed setting up a Trust for the bereaved and survivors. I was suspicious because Father Oliver had advised us that it was better for the group not to deal with any finances, as it might attract people who were only interested in accessing the money. Shahin agreed with Father Oliver and this is why Grenfell United does not deal with money.

122. Father Oliver also warned us that it was strange that Ibrahim El-Noor wanted to set up a Trust to deal with financial donations. Ibrahim El-Noor tried to get people to work with him, by saying that we needed money.

123. Ibrahim El-Noor also tried to infiltrate a meeting of the leaseholders. A few days after the fire, Shah Ahmed had called a meeting of the leaseholders at the Garden Bar because we were all anxious about our living situation. We had to ask Ibrahim El-Noor to leave because he was not a leaseholder. I am not sure how he heard about the meeting, or why he thought, it was appropriate for him to attend.

124. A while later, I think it was Mahad Egal, revealed that Ibrahim El-Noor was a fraud. He did not have an aunt who lived in the Tower and had never even visited the Tower. Rather than working with the group which we, the bereaved, survivors and residents had formed, the Government introduced us to a man who was trying to set up a rival group and they had not even done the basic checks to make sure that he was legitimate.

Other comments

125. All of the faith groups were very good to us, even those faith communities not based in our community, such as the Jewish community. It was wonderful to see given the tragedy.
126. The Government did not support us in the immediate aftermath of the fire. I thought that things would change after Theresa May's apology and her promise to rehouse us in 3 weeks, but it all turned out to be a lie.
127. IT was clear that RBKC did not have a plan in place to deal with a disaster like the fire; central government should have stepped in sooner.
128. My family and I are struggling to recover from the tragedy on 14 June 2017, it was devastating. It's been much harder than I anticipated to try and move on. I think we are going to carry the trauma for the rest of our lives.

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: 

Manuel Miguel Ferreira Alves

Dated: this 25th day of February 2020