

Witness Statement of: Chiraag Patel

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GRENFELL TOWER FIRE PUBLIC INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHIRAAG PATEL

This statement is a factual statement prepared for the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dealing with modules 3 and 4 in Phase 2 only. It does not, and is not intended to set out my experiences on the night of the fire, or the impact that these events and the aftermath have had on me (and my family).

Signed *Chiraag Patel*

I, **CHIRAAG PATEL**, will say as follows:

1. I lived in Flat 56 of Grenfell Tower. I make this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Fire Public Inquiry.
2. I provided a Witness Statement to the Inquiry dated 28 June 2018 (Unique ID: **IWS00000855**) for the purpose of Phase 1. I also provided three statements to the Metropolitan Police Service dated 3 July 2017, 14 November 2017 and 20 April 2018.

3. This statement addresses the issues within module 3 (fire safety within the Tower and communication with residents) and module 4 (aftermath) from the Inquiry's stated Phase 2 schedule. I deal with issues relating to module 3 in paragraphs 8-41, and module 4 in paragraphs 42-80.

Background

4. I was born in London and grew up in the Tower. My parents and my older brother lived in the flat from 1984 and I was born two years after.
5. I moved into my own flat in Ladbroke Grove in May 2016. I still kept a lot of my childhood and teenage years' belongings stored at my parents' flat before the fire, all of which I have now lost together with some of my childhood memories associated with these items.
6. I had lived in the Tower for most of my life. We knew some of our neighbours for many years. My brother and I also attended school with some of them. The thing I enjoyed most about the flat were the views of the London skyline.
7. I was staying at my parents' flat on the night of the fire.

MODULE 3 ISSUES

Complaints and communications with RBKC and the TMO prior to the refurbishment

8. My parents bought the lease to the flat in June 2000. The service charge provisions of the lease set out that RBKC remain responsible for providing and maintaining background central heating and hot water supply to the flat for the months October to April inclusive in each calendar year.

9. I did not have any active involvement in dealing with the TMO and was never contacted by them before I moved out of the Tower. I knew that they circulated a newsletter quarterly and would sometimes see it in the flat but I was not really aware of what it had contained.
10. I was aware of a number of complaints that my father made throughout the years prior to the fire, which I describe briefly below.
11. Hot water supply and water pressure was a constant issue. The water pressure in the building was too low, which affected the hot water supply. Sometimes we would not have any hot water in the flat. My father complained several times to the TMO but this had not been resolved.
12. The radiators were very temperamental. Sometimes they would not work at all. I assume the problem was due to water pressure, as with the hot water supply. When the weather was cold it was very hard to heat up the flat.
13. The windows were also very bad and it could get quite draughty in the flat.
14. There were some winters when it got really cold in our flat because the radiators failed to come on or took a long time to heat up coupled with the draught coming from the windows.
15. When there was no heating my father would complain to the TMO. These problems were not resolved by the TMO. My father eventually installed a pump which fixed the issue with the water pressure.
16. There was also a series of leaks in the kitchen that my father reported to the TMO numerous times. But it remained unresolved and my father eventually tried to fix it himself. Someone eventually came to repair it but I am not sure who instructed them.

17. Our intercom was broken for a long time. It was eventually fixed and was working at the time of the fire.
18. I do not know what the TMO's complaint procedure was and do not remember seeing any materials from the TMO on this. I do not recall seeing any tenant handbooks either. I did see some of the TMO newsletters in the flat. But I would not have known who to contact on building management issue. I presume there was a complaints procedure that my father followed.
19. My perception of the TMO was generally not good. Their focus seemed to be on everyday maintenance, such as clearing rubbish or painting over graffiti, but the more structural issues, many of them historical, were never dealt with.

Lift

20. The lifts used to break down at least once a month and sometimes more. They were usually fixed within a few days. The TMO did not always put up signs when the lifts were out of service. Sometimes a lift would just be stuck on one floor. The lifts were replaced before the refurbishment and the new lifts were reliable.

The Refurbishment

21. I attended a consultation meeting held by Rydon and the TMO in the staff area of the Tower. This was a large room on the walkway level that was normally closed off to residents. Once the refurbishment of the lobby started this was closed off and they opened this part of the building as a make shift entrance. They showed us pictures of what they wanted to do and I think they may have had a model. We were able to ask questions to representatives of Rydon and TMO. I was interested in the changes they were planning to make. I also asked about the

new lobby and what it would look like. They talked about how they were going to over clad the building and showed us examples of different colour choices of the cladding. Following the meeting some samples of cladding were stuck on the building so we could see what it would look like. These were samples in different colour and I did not know if they were different in any other way. We were told that we would be invited to vote on the cladding options but I do not think this vote ever happened. I certainly was not invited to vote nor had I received any communications about a vote following my attendance of this meeting. I remember that the discussions on cladding at the meeting seemed to be focussed on aesthetics.

22. I do not remember seeing the TMO's Works Information Pack. However I did see some of their newsletters on the refurbishment. I think they were regular. I met Claire Williams at the meeting, who was very friendly. Other than that I did not deal with her but I know my father contacted her quite a lot.
23. The refurbishment work itself was very disruptive. The workmen would arrive very early in the morning. I would sometimes see them on the scaffolding outside my window in the morning just as I was getting ready for work, which was awkward.
24. I vaguely recall Rydon's visit at the flat during the refurbishment but I did not really interact with them. My father was the one who was involved in communications with Rydon and TMO on the refurbishment.

Boiler

25. I remember there was a big fuss about the TMO's plan to install the new boilers by the front door because the residents felt they would get in the way. A lot of residents wanted it to be where their old boiler was. Some people would not let the workmen in to their flats to make the change.

26. My father was also very unhappy with the location of the boiler. Eventually we got the choice to have it in the kitchen after pressure from the residents, however this required running pipes along the ceiling of several rooms of the flat, which my father liked even less, so he agreed to have it by the front door.

Windows

27. My father said the work on the windows was very lazy. I do not remember what was wrong with them but he told me not to touch them. He was not happy about it and made a complaint to the TMO.
28. I cannot remember if, or when, the windows were eventually fixed because there were multiple issues with them. My father would complain to me about the workmanship of the builders in regards to the installation of the windows.

Fire Safety at the Tower

29. In 2010, a fire broke out in one of the flats in the building and I found out then that the communal fire alarms had not worked for a few years. This caused me a great deal of concern. I only ever recall seeing firefighters at the Tower during previous fires. I do remember a specific fire at the Tower in around 2010 when I saw a fire fighter inspecting the control panel for the fire alarm on the ground floor the day following the fire.
30. During the refurbishment, I heard the TMO were thinking about putting gas pipes in the stairwell of the Tower, which I also found very concerning. However I did not feel that there was much that I could do about these concerns.

31. I did not know if any fire safety checks had been carried out at the Tower and did not witness any inspection or assessment taking place when I was living there or staying with my parent after I moved out.

Evacuation and Stay Put Policy

32. We were not provided with any fire safety advice from RBKC or the TMO and were not informed by them that the building had a “stay put” policy. The TMO did not put up any fire safety notices in the communal areas of the building that would tell us what to do or where to go in the event of a fire. However I was aware of the stay put policy from my own general knowledge and knew that if the fire was not in your flat it was best to stay where you are. I think my parents would say the same.

Escape Route

33. No fire drills took place in the Tower when I was living there and I understand from my parents none was carried out after the refurbishment had completed - I do not personally remember any.
34. I did not know if there was a designated meeting point should we be evacuated from the building in the event of a fire.
35. Following the works the fire escape route changed in the lower floors. We lived there for a long time so we knew parts of the route well. However, on the night of the fire, once we got to the lower floors where the new flats were, it became very confusing for us. We did not really know where to go because that part of the building had completely changed. It was highly stressful with everything that was happening around us and having to make our way down the stairs without any shoes on.

36. A lot of the other residents used the lifts generally. If they were trying to get out using the stairs for the first time on the night of the fire it could have been very confusing for them.

Fire Alarms

37. There were two fire alarms in our flat, one near the front door and the other near the kitchen. My father installed them many years ago.
38. Every floor in the Tower had a communal fire alarm in the landing outside the lift doors. When the fire happened in 2010, I heard from my father that the communal fire alarms had not been working for a number of years. This caused me great concern because it indicated to me that the Tower had not been maintained properly and that no one had noticed or checked these things.

Communal Area

39. The communal area was well kept and had a fire door to the stairwell. I do not remember if this door would close automatically, nor do I remember having any issues with this door.

Fire Extinguishers/Sprinklers

40. I am not sure if there was a fire extinguisher or sprinkler on our floor. I recall some sort of panel which may have had an extinguisher behind it but it may have been a riser.

MODULE 4 ISSUES

14 June 2017 – The Night of the Fire

41. I have set out in paragraphs 6-29 of my Phase 1 statement details of my recollection of events of the early hours of 14 June 2017 but I briefly describe below what happened immediately after the fire.
42. I was asleep when my father woke me up at the night of the fire. As everything happened so quickly and we were in total shock. My mother and I left the flat straightaway leaving all our belongings behind. We did not even get a chance to put our shoes on before we had to rush out of our flat. My father followed a little later as he was putting on his clothes and looking for his car keys.
43. As we were escaping we passed some firefighters in the stairwell. When we got to the lower floors where the new flats were we became very disorientated because the escape route of that part of the building had changed completely after the refurbishment even though I had taken this exit before. But we eventually managed to make our way down to the ground floor by following the other residents in front of me. I noticed that all of the exits we walked pass were wedged open.
44. Once we were out and running away from the Tower the police directed us to the sports centre where all the other residents who had managed to escape were waiting. As we made our way towards the sports centre debris fell very near to us. We were then cordoned off round the corner from the Tower and kept getting pushed back by the police.
45. My parents then drove to my flat in Ladbroke Grove but I stayed at the Tower for an hour to an hour and a half, talking to others from the area. I walked around to the other side of the Tower to see if it was on fire and saw that it was. I did not walk much more as I had no shoes on. My mum had no shoes either but I think my father did.
46. I watched burning debris falling off the Tower continuously at this point and could see that some were being carried by the wind beyond the immediate base

of the Tower. There was a huge amount of thick black smoke. I breathed in a lot of it during my escape but I do not know if I was still breathing it in after I left the Tower. It smelt like burning plastic.

47. I did not receive assistance from anyone during this time. I also did not see any officials from RBKC or the TMO. The police directed us to an area outside the leisure centre. Over time they would instruct us to go further and further back from the Tower. I do not remember them ever offering assistance or checking if we were ok.
48. My father drove back to pick me up later with my brother. My brother brought some slippers for me. My father's car was in a parking space but was blocked by a fire engine where he was parked so we all walked back to my flat.

Emergency Accommodation

49. The day after the fire I stayed at my flat while my parents went to stay with my uncle. This arrangement lasted for two weeks. No one from RBKC or the TMO had reached out to any of us during this time. Eventually my father received a few phone calls from someone who said they worked for RBKC's insurers and also from RBKC themselves. I think this was about two weeks after the fire. Then accommodation was arranged for my parents at the Hilton Olympia. They stayed there for around 6 weeks. I never visited them at the hotel but I understand from them that they did not like living in a hotel. They said it was fine in terms of their basic needs: they had a bed and a roof over their head but it was not the same as home.

Obtaining information following the fire

50. We visited the Rugby Club briefly a day or two after the fire to confirm that we had escaped the fire and to give our details. We also signed up to a Whatsapp group during this visit. There was a book to sign and add your phone number to,

which I did. Ed Daffarn was also there with a notebook and was noting down email addresses for a group of survivors they were setting up called Grenfell United. I do not recall who the administrator of the WhatsApp was but it was set up for the bereaved and survivors of the fire and not for TMO and RBKC to contact us. We found out most of the information and assistance available through the Whatsapp group and generally it was reliable. We rarely received information from RBKC, TMO or other official bodies or channels.

51. The second time I went to the Rugby Club was for a meeting with other residents from the Tower. This would have been 2-3 days after the fire. Shaheen Sadafi led the meeting and said that it was about forming a residents group to make sure they got the support they needed. This was the start of what became Grenfell United, although it was officially formed at a later meeting.
52. About a week after the fire we attended a meeting at the Westway. The meeting was odd. It was broken up before it began because a lot of the survivors in attendance did not trust the organiser. It was generally felt amongst those attending that he was working for RBKC therefore could not be trusted to put the residents' needs first. Grenfell United was formed out of this desire for the residents to be represented by someone that they trust.
53. About a month after the fire, we found out about a meeting through the Whatsapp group and attended. This was the meeting when Grenfell United was formed. Shaheen brought in someone who had experience of forming NGOs. A committee was also elected although I am not entirely sure that was at this meeting.
54. Later, I attended workshops put on by Grenfell United and discussed my experiences. I found it very useful to talk to others about the fire. To me, Grenfell United was an early sign that the official response would be poorly organised and the community would have to fend for itself.

55. We found out about these meetings through the WhatsApp group, which was how we obtained most information about what was happening with Grenfell and to find out about other services like housing and financial support. There was no contact from RBKC in the immediate days after the fire. I felt that the community was far more organised than the RBKC or other governmental authorities.
56. There was a Google spreadsheet listing who lived at Grenfell Tower that was circulated amongst the tenants via the Whatsapp group. I am not sure if it was an official record but I assumed it was. Some of the information was correct but some other was outdated, for example some residents were on the list but had moved out or died years ago. It made me think that RBKC did not know who was living there and who was missing.

Communication with RBKC and the TMO after the fire

57. I visited the TMO office on Kensal Road with my family very soon after the fire, maybe a day or two. It is located just across the road from where I live. One of the staff there used to work on the front desk of Grenfell Tower before they removed the front desk during the refurbishment. He recognised us and asked after my mum. We went there to report that we had survived.
58. The only other contact I am aware of from RBKC was when they contacted my father regarding housing and I think he also spoke to someone at the RBKC booth at the Westway. I did not know of anyone coordinating the relief efforts and it made me feel that we were deserted by the authorities and RBKC. I was quite worried about where my parents were going to live and it took a while to find out what was going on. It was a confusing time. My parents and I did not know who to contact. There were a lot of different groups but we did not know what they were for or which was doing what. We heard of Gold Command from other residents but we also did not know what they did.

59. The only official written communication was about a year after my parents started receiving a newsletter for survivors. It contained useful resources, such as access to counselling and events for residents, and information about the Curve.

Relief Centres

60. In the early stages, a day or two after the fire, there were no provisions being distributed at the Rugby Club. The first time we received toiletries provision was from the Notting Hill Methodist Church.
61. The timeliness of provisions could have been an issue. We escaped with just the clothes we had on us. We were lucky that we were able to go to my uncle's for help. None of us carried any identification on us. We also had no cash at all, nor any bank cards. My uncle gave us some money so the next day we visited Primark and did not need much more in terms of clothes during this period immediately after the fire.
62. At this point no official person either from RBKC or TMO reached out to us. I felt like my parents and I had to fend for ourselves and we were not always sure where to go for help.
63. The first time we went to the Westway we were unable to enter as it was closed for Prince William's visit. The first time I managed to enter the Westway it was roughly 10 days to 2 weeks after the fire. As I recall they had provisions such as food and bottled water. They had stands on the tennis court of the leisure centre to help residents with bills, legal advice and counselling as well as assistance getting new passports and other official documents. It seemed relatively well organised with many governmental departments having stalls there such as the DVLA. The only services I personally required was obtaining a new drivers licence and a passport. Within 24 hours of my visit I had a new passport and within another 24 hours I had a new driving license. I also spoke to a person from an organisation called INQUEST about legal advice. They referred us to the

Kensington Law Centre. My father visited some of the other booths, but I do not recall which ones. There was no one in particular who would show us where to go when we first arrived. I do not recall meeting anyone from the RBKC or TMO there. After seeing someone at the door, who gave us an overview of what stalls and services were available and roughly where they were located, we were left to wander around on our own.

64. Sometimes the doors of the Rugby Club were open and we were able to just walk in. The other times it was closed. It was run by volunteers so it could not always be open. At first we went there for information and then for financial support from the charity fund. My father also received a laptop and phone from there. I would sometimes use this laptop before I bought my own. The Rugby Club was more useful to us than the Westway. For example, we learnt from the WhatsApp group that we could get financial support, if needed, from the Rugby Club.
65. I think perhaps because the Westway was closed when I first tried to visit, my impression was that Rugby Club were able to provide financial and other support relatively quickly. We found it difficult to find clothes at the relief centres we visited. We did not need much as my uncle had given us some money which we used to buy some clothes immediately after the fire and as soon as we managed to regain access to our bank accounts we were able to purchase the things we needed.
66. We were aware of other relief centres through the WhatsApp group but we generally attended the Rugby Club because we were more familiar with it. It seemed better for finding what we needed, which was usually information rather than provisions.
67. We found out about the Methodist Church via the WhatsApp group and I went there in the first week after the fire for toiletries and clothes. It was very busy and hectic with a lot of volunteers. I eventually found someone to show me around and I managed to find toiletries for all my family but I struggled to find

suitable clothes. I was treated well there, the volunteers were helpful. I did not see anyone from RBKC or the TMO there.

68. I went to the Curve with my parents for the first time between six months and a year after the fire. In total I probably visited the Curve 2-3 times. They offered services such as counselling and organised events for the residents. However, unlike the Rugby Club and the Westway, it was a community centre and was used by the local community, not just Grenfell survivors. As such, we would visit for a specific purpose. My father would meet with the other residents there informally and we went there to meet our solicitors. No one from RBKC or TMO attended any of these meetings. . As this was well after the fire we did not need provisions. We also attended a social gathering there. The last time I went to the Curve was probably around 18 months after the fire.

Key Workers

69. We were assigned 3 or 4 key workers. I think the first we had lasted at least two months before we asked for a new one. The second and third left after a few weeks. They were separate to the housing officers.
70. Our first key worker was not very good. In fact, he was very unhelpful. Often he would not respond to our queries and when he did he usually did not know the answer. For that reason we eventually stopped asking him for help.
71. We did have one key worker that was very good and seemed more interested than the others. He came to visit us. But he had to step down after about two weeks as he had been assigned too many people to look after.
72. As a result we mostly organised anything we needed ourselves rather than relying on key workers as we just wanted to get on with things. At one point everything

had to be done through our key worker, which made things more difficult as they were not always responsive.

Temporary Accommodation

73. A couple of weeks after the fire someone from RBKC contacted my parents to arrange temporary accommodation for them. They were assigned a housing officer from Westminster Council who organised the viewings.
74. My parents' temporary accommodation was in the Gloucester Road area. Kensington Law Centre explained the tenancy agreement to us and my parents signed it there. The RBKC housing officer went on maternity leave at this point and my parents were assigned another housing officer. I do not remember the details of their involvement but it was limited because, by then, their temporary accommodation was finalised. I did not deal with them myself.

Financial Assistance

75. I did not seek any financial support but my parents did. They received some cash from the Rugby club. The money from the Evening Standard fund was paid directly to the bank accounts of those to whom it had been allocated, organised by the Rugby Club. There were several payments. I believe my parents also received funds from RBKC at the Westway, around 2 weeks after the fire. As with most of the information regarding the relief centres, we found out about these payments via the WhatsApp group. As far as I remember I did not discuss our financial needs with a keyworker or anyone else from RBKC, although it is possible that my father did.

Medical Assistance

76. On the morning after the fire I convinced my parents to come with me to St Charles hospital to get checked out. I wanted to do it because we all breathed in

a lot of smoke during our escape. The smoke was quite potent. It irritated my throat and lungs so I wanted to get checked out. It also smelt like burning plastic. We waited for 20-30 minutes before we were seen. They ran some tests and advised that we were all fine.

Counselling

77. After the fire we were in shock. We heard about counselling from non-governmental bodies, such as the churches providing support to the bereaved, survivors and residents. But no one reached out to us directly.

78. Eventually I received telephone calls offering counselling from St Charles Hospital; this was a long time after the fire, maybe a few months. Initially I was assessed over the phone. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I had three sessions of counselling and was then discharged. I felt this was inadequate but it was the only counselling I was offered. About a year later, St Charles contacted me again and offered some more counselling sessions. These were more helpful as I was assigned a different counsellor whom I preferred. She seemed more interested in me and my life.

79. The counselling with St Charles stopped the second time because I stopped attending. They have offered to start the sessions again when I am ready. I did not arrange any more sessions and I have not had any follow up calls.

Impact

80. I will not describe in this statement for the Inquiry the devastating impact of the fire on my life and my parents. We have all suffered the loss of our friends and home.

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:


Chiraag Patel

DATED: 25/02/20