

THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF AGNES MURRAY

I, Agnes Murray, WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I make this statement to provide evidence to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry on matters relevant to module 3 (fire safety measures) and module 4 (aftermath) as specified in the document entitled 'List of Issues for BSR phase 2 witness statements'. The statements I make are from my own knowledge or belief unless otherwise stated. If not from my own knowledge I will identify the source.
2. I have not previously made a statement to the Inquiry. I have not provided a statement to the police.
3. I first address briefly disrepair in the property, before addressing fire safety measures. I then address the aftermath of the fire.
4. I wish to clarify that my first language is Polish. I did not ask RBKC/TMO for an interpreter as I speak good English. I have chosen to complete this statement in English and without assistance from an interpreter.

Complaints of Disrepair

5. I have lived in Barandon Walk since July 1997. I live with my daughter. When we moved into the property it was in a very poor condition. Across my tenancy there have been ongoing issues with disrepair in my property that have required me to make numerous complaints to the TMO. My complaints were not handled in a helpful or efficient manner.

Fire Safety Measures

Fire Safety Systems

6. During my residence at Barandon Walk I noticed various issues which concern fire safety systems. I address each of these below.

Flat doors

7. Around 2009 or 2010 my property door was changed. This meant my door was different from the rest of those in the walkways. I cannot remember if this door was self-closing or had any smoke seals.
8. After the fire my front door was replaced by RBKC.

Smoke alarms

9. I don't remember any issues with the smoke alarms in my property. Every so often a person from RBKC/TMO would attend to check the smoke alarms.

Fire safety checks/inspections

10. A fire safety check took place around 2012. I recall that the fire safety check comprised of a person looking around our home. They were checking the plugs.

Fire safety advice

11. I cannot remember if we were provided with fire safety advice after moving into the property. On the night of the fire I did not really think about if I knew what to do, I just ran out of the property.

Aftermath

Emergency shelter and accommodation

12. During the fire, I left my home and went to the terrace right outside of my flat. One of my neighbours was there and was speaking on his phone. He had a friend in another housing block that was opposite the Kensington Leisure Centre. This neighbour said people were asking for water and blankets.
13. I had some bottles of mineral water in my flat, so I returned to my flat and took a blanket and bottles of water. I took them down to the green and gave everything to a fireman. I just wanted to help. I was panicking. It was chaotic. I did not see anyone from the council. No one told us what to do. My neighbour's wife brought a towel from their flat, which I took downstairs as well.
14. At some point, I passed some police officers. I told them where I lived and asked them if we would be evacuated. The police said no so I went back into my flat again.
15. My daughter and I left Barandon Walk in the early hours of the morning. I think at this time police were telling people that we needed to leave. It was still dark but just getting light, it was around 4am. I cannot quite remember. We took our dog with us.
16. We went to stand on the grass outside Barandon Walk on Grenfell Road. I remember the smoke and the smell of the fire being around us. We stood there for a while watching the fire. There were many other people there and TV crews at first. Over time people started to leave.
17. At about 6am I needed to use the bathroom. My daughter and I went to the Clement James Centre and both used the bathroom, taking turns to wait with our dog outside.
18. The church had opened as a centre for people. We were told we could not go in there as we had our dog with us.

19. My daughter has additional needs. These needs mean she may feel uncomfortable if she is left alone. An old family friend offered to come and sit with my daughter. This meant I could go to Westfield at 10am when it opened and get a new charger for my mobile phone, as it was out of battery. I returned from Westfield as quickly as I could.
20. We stayed around the church until around 3 or 4pm. A friend of mine had called me in the morning to say that she was away and that we could stay in her flat. I went and collected the keys to her flat from another friend.
21. At the church I spoke to some people from RBKC. I saw they had a table set-up there. I went up to them and asked as I thought they might be collecting names. One council employee told us we could go to a hotel. At that point I did not understand the seriousness of the fire. I did not know how many had died. I did not realise the scale of the tragedy. I was still hoping everyone had been evacuated.
22. I said I didn't want to be a burden as they had people from the Tower to take care of so I offered to stay with friends. There was so much confusion. I didn't ask for details about the hotel. I was worried about where any hotel would be and if it would meet my daughter's needs. I regret that now because it meant that we returned to Barandon Walk sooner than we might have done, and life was very difficult there on our return. We went and stayed at my friends until the third day after the fire.
23. On the second day after the fire I went to our flat on my own without my daughter as we realised we did not take her medication when we left. I called the doctor but I thought they would take 48 hours to do the prescription. A neighbour told me that we could go and get something from the flat in an emergency. I was escorted by a policeman to go upstairs and get her medication.
24. Relief centres were busy with donated food and tables set out - it was chaotic. On the second day the centre at the Church gave us food, sanitary wear and clothing. They were very supportive to us.

25. On the third day after the fire I got a text in the afternoon that said we could return to our home. I think they took my details at the centre when I spoke to them about the hotel, so they had my number to contact me. I think someone called me as well. I think I was given a number to call for help, but it was so chaotic and there was so much to do I misplaced it.

Return to Barandon Walk

26. Our return to our flat was very stressful. There was no gas. We had no hot water for showering and washing dishes. I may have been told about there being no gas and hot water before we returned home, I cannot quite remember. At the time I did not think we had any other options and I thought all the residents were returning to these conditions. I think we spent about 10-14 days without hot water. We took cold showers. We had been told we could use showers at the Westway but this would have been very stressful.
27. We had an electric cooker so I used that to prepare meals. I did not like cooking however as our kitchen window completely faces the Tower. For a long time I did not enjoy cooking or eating meals and often avoided it. I would buy sandwiches or a ready meal to try and avoid having to cook in my kitchen and having to see the Tower as the reminder would put me off cooking and eating.
28. We had no internet when we returned. To the best of my recollection this lasted about a week or longer. This meant it was harder to stay in touch with friends and family and harder to find information online about what was going on.
29. During the first days, we were particularly frightened that the Tower would collapse. My daughter and I slept on the sofas in our sitting room so we could be together. We wanted to be together in case anything happened. We planned escape routes in case of a further fire or the Tower collapsing as we were so anxious.
30. It was inconvenient to come and go as police asked for ID to get into the building. There were cameras and the press everywhere, this made it additionally stressful. It meant that my daughter did not want to leave the flat.

31. When we returned to the flat, there were sponge-like pieces of debris on our balcony. I swept them all up and cleaned our balcony. I was down on the floor sweeping it. I may have breathed in small pieces and it went in my eyes and nose. Small pieces that had settled on the roof of the building continued to fall down onto the balcony across the following months. I came across further debris while out and about in the local area, particularly when I was walking my dog.
32. I was and remain incredibly worried about the health impacts to my daughter and I. I am concerned that we were exposed to this debris and we breathed it in on the night of the fire and the following period.
33. Within the first week, I did some clothes washing and went to hang them on my washing line. I wiped it down as it had black dirt on it from the fire. I hung the clean clothes and bedding outside. This was a mistake as there was still ash and debris in the air. It stuck to my bedding and clothes. I felt like we could not get anything clean.
34. I was advised by someone that we could go in to temporary accommodation. I was worried as I thought if we moved I would have to buy new essentials such as bedding. I didn't have a lot of money for big expenses. I didn't want to beg for help. I found it too stressful and confusing. I was worried if we went to temporary accommodation for a short period then we would not be allowed to come back to our flat and we may lose it, so altogether it was very confusing.
35. I believe we were told we could stay in the sports centre at the Westway during the first few days. However I could not imagine my daughter and the dog staying there and coping with having no privacy. It would have been very difficult to cope.
36. I think at one point RBKC offered to put our dog into a kennel. My daughter is very reliant on our dog, so I could not think about separating them especially given that my daughter was already traumatised from witnessing the fire. This was a really difficult position to be put in.

Food and drink

37. After the fire, some relief centres provided my daughter and I with some food and drink. It was difficult to travel to any shops as the roads were closed and there were no buses running so we were stuck around the area, this meant this help was needed.

Basic provisions and financial assistance

38. I found out about assistance through word of mouth from neighbours. Within the first week after the fire, I was given some emergency financial assistance. It helped as I had to buy essentials when I was staying at my friend's flat e.g. clothes, towels, hygiene essentials, phone chargers. It also helped to be able to buy food given the stress, it was easier to get something than trying to be food shopping and cooking. Before receiving this assistance I bought the things we needed using my credit card.
39. My neighbour and I both needed toilet paper. There was not any to collect in the Westway Centre, but there was a big pile of it just outside. We thought it might have been donated. We asked a nearby charity worker if we could both take some toilet paper from the pile, they replied "you can take it if you want to be arrested". I thought this very rude and unnecessary. I was just asking to see if it was available.
40. I am grateful for financial assistance that I received. You had to go and ask for any financial assistance. It sort of felt like having to beg for it. I don't know why it wasn't more of an automatic process, if you could show you had been evacuated.

Psychological support

41. I used the NHS services at the Curve. I then received some psychological support from the service at St Charles. I have had some counselling on and off.
42. I have suffered psychological trauma as a result of the fire and I continue to suffer.

43. I was told I would not be given a keyworker as they were only for Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk residents. At some point later I was told that I would be given some kind of support worker. They did not make it clear to me that this policy had changed. I was assigned one. The worker met with me, listened, and gave some advice but I was not sure what powers they had to help.

Information and assistance

44. I did not try to find out any details about missing people. I had people in the Tower I was worried about. I found out what had happened to them through word of mouth from the community and the news.

Public communication

45. I found it hard to access information about services and support. I heard about things through word of mouth from neighbours and the community.
46. I feel it would have been easier to access information if we had been in a hotel. For people that were back in the Walkways there was not much information. I went to various centres that had opened to try and find out information. I had to go looking for it myself.
47. Some leaflets were put on the floor of our building. If you didn't pick up a leaflet you wouldn't see what information it contained. Later they were posted through letterboxes but at first they were just left on the ground floor of the building. It was messy and chaotic.
48. I wouldn't have known who to contact for specific help. I did not know who to call or what the right organisations were. The changes between organisations meant it was very confusing. People were traumatised and in shock, they could not be expected to find out everything for themselves.

Needs of specific groups

49. I did not find that the needs of specific groups were properly met by the emergency relief response. My daughter has additional needs, I am not sure if RBKC/TMO would have been aware. There was not any evidence in the council's response to the fire that they had considered people with additional needs.

Coordination and leadership

50. I found the coordination of Central Government, RBKC and the TMO in the immediate aftermath of the fire to be inadequate.

51. Public meetings were not properly publicised. There might be an important meeting, but not everyone was told about it. People had to rely on word of mouth to find out what was taking place.

52. It was not clear what support was available. It was also not clear what support was available that was just for people who had lived in Grenfell Tower or had lost a loved one. It was confusing. This meant I did not know what was available for us and I did not want to access support that was only meant for Tower residents. Different levels of help were offered to people in similar circumstances. I did not want to be a burden when others were in need, although my daughter and I were struggling.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed:.....*A Murray*.....

Dated:.....*24 / 02 / 2020*.....