

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF EMMA O'CONNOR

I, Emma O'Connor, previously of Flat 171, 20th Floor of Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, London, W11 1TQ, WILL SAY as follows:

1. This statement should be read alongside my first Inquiry Witness Statement dated 17 May 2018 (IWS00000121), my Metropolitan Police Statement dated 21 June 2017 (MET00007357). I consent to my MPS statement being disclosed to the Inquiry for use in evidence.

Fire safety systems

I list below the defects I identified prior to, during and post the refurbishment:

Lifts

2. I detailed at paragraph 22 of my IWS the issues with the lifts during the refurbishment. I wish to add that the doors would often jam. The lift doors would stick and sometimes you would have to manually pull the door closed.
3. I complained about the lifts on a number of occasions but this is not contained within my housing file.

Flat doors, including the self-closing devices and smoke seals/strips

4. I outline at paragraph 12 of my IWS details regarding our front door. The door was extremely light; it would slam shut when the windows were open. I recall the front door had a small seal around it but I am unsure if this was a smoke seal. A draught used to come in through the front door. There was a lot of damage to the wall next to the front door from the handle hitting the wall when it was flung open. This damage was caused by the handle (because it was so light). I do not remember reporting these issues.

Communal doors throughout the building (including the stair doors), including the self-closing devices and smoke seals/strips

5. The communal doors were heavy and some had glass windows in them. I do not recall if there were smoke seals and strips around them.

Windows, including the window reveals and kitchen extractor fans

6. I detailed at paragraphs 18-19 of my IWS the issues we experienced with the windows.
7. I have been shown an email by my solicitor dated 16 October 2015 from Chris Holt to Ben Bailey cc'ing Lynda Prentice and Simon Lawrence at Rydon stating *"they have expressed their concern that some of the window handles are not 100% straight when in locked position facing down. I have spoken to Taff who said they are within tolerance but TMO will need assurances that there is nothing wrong with them and he suggested that we ask for a visit by the manufacturer. The Clerk of Works will be inspecting the properties soon for the hand over and will pick up on this as well."* (HAR00016065) I remember mentioning to Claire Williams and the other person that attended that when we closed the window in our bedroom the handle was not straight.
8. I have also seen a further email dated 16 October 2015 from Chris Holt to Ben Bailey cc'ing Lynda Prentice and Simon Lawrence stating *"Flat 171 has a hinge mechanism that is broken. I have just visited the property with Claire from TMO who has now accepted that the damage has been caused by the resident and will pay for its replacement."* (HAR00016064). The damage was not caused by us. The hinge broke when Luke closed the window from a tilted position.
9. I have been shown by my solicitor an email dated 3 December 2015 from Chris Holt to Claire Williams which states *"On the final inspection with Jon at 171 Grenfell Tower this morning, we noticed that 2 No. window restrictors were missing. The resident has told us that they removed them themselves and refused to have them fitted back."* (TMOH00011338) Luke took the window restrictors off. We did not have any use for them as we understood they were essentially child locks. We only really opened the windows in the tilted position, unless we were using the tumble dryer.
10. My solicitor has shown me a letter from the TMO dated 7 December 2015 addressed to me stating that we had removed the window restrictors. (TMOH00006047). I never saw this letter.
11. I have also been shown an email dated 24 May 2016 which states that we reported the

window was broken again and further states we broke the window by putting out the flexible vent from the tumble dryer. (RYD00079247) We only put this out when the window was open fully. This did not break the window.

12. The last time Claire Williams attended about the window she informed us that if the window broke again we would have to pay to have it fixed and this would cost around £200.
13. I incorrectly detail in my IWS that the window was left closed after it broke for the third time. It was left open. It was open on the night of the fire.
14. I detailed at paragraph 20 of my IWS the issues we experienced with the extractor fan. I wish to add that the extractor fan was extremely loud until Luke took the wind guard out. I took a video of the fan. [EO/1].

Fire safety signage

15. There was a fire safety sign by the lift. This sign told us to stay put in the event of a fire. I always thought that I would not stay put as I could only exit the building by the lift due to my mobility issues.

Escape routes

16. I detailed at page 2 of my MPS statement and paragraph 10 of my IWS that there was a fire exit on the roof but it was always padlocked. I raised this as a safety concern to the security guard downstairs when there was a concierge who told me they would raise it with the TMO. I also raised it on the phone to the TMO once but I was told not to worry about it. However, this is not detailed in my housing file.
17. The only escape route was therefore the lift and the stairs. For me the only route was the lift as I would not be able to walk down the stairs. I did not raise this but I think Luke did.

Emergency lighting

18. I left the building in the lift. I am not aware if the emergency lighting was working as I did not really use the stairs.

Smoke control or ventilation system

19. The smoke control system was extremely loud and noisy. You could sometimes hear children shouting through it.

Smoke alarms

20. I detailed at page 2 of my MPS statement and paragraphs 8 and 11 of my IWS the smoke detectors in our flat and in the communal hallway. The smoke alarm in my flat did not go off on the night of the fire but it had previously gone off. I had heard

rumours from other residents that the smoke alarms in the communal hallway had been turned off for the gas works

Gas works carried out by Cadent Gas/tRHO at Grenfell Tower

21. I detailed at page 2 of my MPS witness statement that the gas works were being carried out in 2017. At the time of the fire the gas pipes in the stairwells were being boxed in. We did not have gas in our house.

Fire safety checks/inspections

22. I detailed at page 2 of my MPS statement and paragraph 9 of my IWS that I cannot recall being contact by the TMO or RBKC in relation to safety or fire guidelines. A few months before the fire the London Fire Brigade attended our flat to check the alarms. They did not check anything else such as the door. I think the firefighter who attended was Danny Brown.

Fire safety advice

23. The only fire safety advice I was aware of was stay put. I was aware of this because of the sign next to the lift and Janice also informed us.
24. Both RBKC and the TMO were aware of my mobility issues as early as 2012. My Health and Disability assessment dated 11 January 2012 recommends a ground floor flat with no more than 6 steps to access the premises or up to 2nd floor max with lifted provision suitable for needs [EO/2]. This assessment was completed before I had a fall and was permanently on crutches. I understand that we were placed on the 20th floor as there was lift access and therefore my mobility was not an issue.
25. The TMO were informed when my mobility reduced further as I contacted them to inform them I could not get to my flat when the lift was broken and I explained that I was on crutches. This is not detailed in my housing file. I made a number of complaints about the issues with the lifts and explained every time that I could not use the stairs due to my mobility issues.
26. I did not think what would happen if there was a fire in the building. I always assumed I would be able to use the lift. There was no emergency evacuation procedure discussed with us and no one from the TMO visited us about it.

Power surges 2013

27. I detailed at paragraph 13 of my IWS the power surge we experienced in 2013.

Complaints of Disrepair

19. I did not feel that my complaints regarding the lifts or the windows were effectively dealt with.
20. I note that the majority of my complaints were not recorded in the copy of the Housing File which was obtained by my legal representatives despite multiple requests for the relevant information.
21. Other complaints we made during our time living at Flat 171 , including the silverfish that came from the windowsill after the replacement of the windows. We also had tree bugs which invaded our kitchen. A boiler exploded on the 23rd floor and the water leaked into our flat. After that we had issues with mould and mushrooms growing in the kitchen. Despite our complaints this not dealt with by the TMO..

Consultation process regarding refurbishment

28. I detailed at page 2 of my MPS statement that I was not consulted regarding the refurbishment process.
29. I received a couple of newsletters from Rydon which contained a play by play update of what they were doing and how long they expected it to take.
30. We received a letter from RBKC adult services and disability team for the person who lived in the property before. I contacted them several times and told them the person was deceased. However, we received about 12 letters during the period of time we were living at Grenfell Tower. The last one we received was in around 2014.

AFTERMATH

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

31. I outlined in my IWS at paragraph 34 that we stayed at my mum's sheltered accommodation for a few days. I think we first attended the Rugby Portobello Club

on 15 June 2017. We were given a donation of £550, some clothes and a mobile phone.

32. I attended the Clement James Centre a few weeks after the fire where I met Howard Taylor.

33. I attended the Westway Centre on 16 June 2017. We spoke to a member of RBKC on a table that was sent up in the same hall as the mattresses. RBKC took down our information including all the details of our medical issues. We were contacted that evening offering us a room at the Crown Plaza on the 10th floor. I explained that we could not take the room as we did not feel comfortable being so high up. Nobody contacted us again so we returned to the Westway Centre on 19 June 2017. We were then offered a room at the Mercure Hotel on Cromwell Road.

34. I outlined in paragraph 34 of my IWS the issues with the Mercure Hotel. We were moved to the Park Plaza London Park Royal Hotel. We stayed there until we moved into our permanent home in March 2018.

35. We were initially unable to move into our flat as there was a leak which flooded the flat. The flood occurred due to an issue with the washing machine pipe and an incorrectly fitted stopcock. Luke had raised concerns regarding this stopcock but we were informed that it was fine.

36. We have made a number of complaints about our current property to Peabody, to our keyworker and to the neighborhood manager Christopher Monk. These include a leaking bathroom tap which is causing mold and damp.

37. We have been informed that a pipe leading to the bath is leaking and has leaked into the downstairs flat.

Food and Drink

38. I ate and drank at the hotels. However, Luke is quite particular when it comes to food and therefore ate out a lot.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

39. Luke's brother came down and brought us clothes.

40. We were provided with emergency payments. We received £550 from the Westway.

Psychological Support

41. Counsellors attended the hotel but I did not personally meet with a counsellor until a few months after the fire.
42. Our key worker was appointed a week after the fire. I think her name was Sharon Taylor. She was our key worker for approximately a year. We were then given a new keyworker.

Voluntary and Community Groups

43. The British Red Cross were at the Westway Centre. They were giving out the wrist bands so people had access to the donations.
44. Shelter helped us with getting rehoused. Howard Taylor from Grenfell United was also a great support. He assisted us in sorting out our passports and accessing available services. He is still the go-to person for anything related to Grenfell.
45. The general public also supported us with donations of food, water and clothes.

Coordination and Leadership

46. The TMO were not present during the aftermath of the fire.
47. It was disappointing that Theresa May failed to meet with the bereaved and survivors in the days following the fire. I was invited to attend 10 Dowling Street a couple of months after the fire. However, when we attended she was out of the country. I felt we were treated with contempt.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

48. I felt let down once I knew there were so many issues with the lifts and I felt we were treated unfairly because we were misinformed about the state of the tower.
49. I feel that the TMO should have worked with the fire brigade and had an evacuation plan.
50. It was disappointing that we were offered rooms in hotels so high up.

**51. I understand that this statement will form part of the evidence before the
Inquiry and will be published on the Inquiry's website in due course.**

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

Signed E.O......

Date 25th / 02 / 2020.....

Emma O'Connor