

Witness Statement: Hiwot DAGNACHEW

Statement No.:2[Statement Number 1]

IWS00000845_0000

Exhibits:0

Date:16 September 2020

THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIWOT DAGNACHEW

FLAT 26, 5th FLOOR

I, **Hiwot Dagnachew**, formerly of Flat 26 Grenfell Tower **WILL SAY** as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a Core Participant in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, and a survivor of the fire on 14 June 2017.
2. I have already submitted a Witness Statement(s) dated 21 May 2018 and this is recorded as document IWS00000845
3. I have made a statement to the Metropolitan Police and I confirm that I consent to any police statement I have made being disclosed to the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.

Module 3

(Active and passive fire safety measures internal to building, management of building, compliance RRO 2005, fire risk assessment, including complaints and communication with residents)

I would refer to my previous witness statement where, I dealt with refurbishments carried out by ourselves.

“18. My flat was my dream home. It was where I planned to live forever. Wintom and I were happy knowing that our children were living and growing up in a safe and stable environment. I had done a lot of work to the flat to make it our home which included replacing the floor, fitting a new bathroom, installing a shower, replacing the worktop and shelving units in the kitchen and painting and decorating.” IWS00000845_0004

Fire Safety Systems

I would refer to my previous witness statement before dealing with the specific points below.

“75. I do not recall being given any information by RBKC about fire safety when I moved into the Tower or anytime thereafter by either RBKC, the Tenants Management Organisation (the 'TM0') or by any other organisation or individual.” [IWS00000845_0014]

4. Please address any issues that you were aware of in relation to the following topics at Grenfell Tower. When you do so, please include whether you reported the issue, the person or organization you reported the issue to and what happened as a result of your report as far as you are aware. Please set out the date of approximate timing of any of the above actions as far as you can recall.

(a) Lifts;

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“88. I was also unhappy with the conduct of Rydon's employees as they had no consideration for the residents of the Tower during the refurbishment works. They would frequently block access to one of the lifts as they would use it to move their equipment up and down the Tower leaving only one lift to serve the residents on all the floors.

89. I was lucky enough to live on one the lower floors of the Tower and would take the stairs if the lift was not available. However, I had friends who lived on the higher floors of the Tower who struggled with the school run during the refurbishment works.

90. My niece, Meron lived on the 19th floor of the Tower and had started dropping her daughter off to my flat early in the morning before Rydon started work as she would not be able to get out of her flat during the morning rush hour.”

[IWS00000845_0017]

The main problem with the lifts was that they would not sometimes work at all. Normally, it would only be one out of order at a time. I remember that while the contractors were in the tower undertaking the refurbishments, the problems were more frequent. I believe that on average one lift would be out of order for a number of hours at least for half of the time. If a lift was not working in the morning, it would normally be working by the evening.

Both lifts would sometimes be out of order, but I am not sure how often this would occur.

I cannot specifically remember reporting any problems regarding the lifts, as I was on the lower floor, so it was not so hard to walk down the stairs. Also, there were so many people living in the flats that lots of people would report the problems.

(b) Flat doors, including the self-closing devices and smoke seals/strips;

Before dealing with this specifically I would refer to my previous witness statement where I stated:

“87. My concerns regarding the modifications to the inside of the Tower were that my front door was replaced as part of the refurbishment works to the Tower. There was an incident after the front door to my flat was replaced when I was trapped inside my flat. I cannot remember when the incident occurred but I was trying to leave home to pick my daughter up from school and I was unable to open my front door. I contacted the TMO and informed them that I was stuck inside my flat and could not get the door to open. I asked for someone to come to my flat to let me out as I needed to pick my daughter up from school. The TMO sent somebody over and he managed to open the door from the outside and carried out repair works to the door. I had no further problems with the new door after these repair works were carried out.” IWS00000845_0016

Further, the contractor who was sent to fix the door offered to take off the self-closing mechanism on the door; and did not mention anything about the risk that this would cause. I chose not to have the self-closing mechanism removed. The reason for deciding this was that it meant when I was in a hurry in the morning, I could just grab my keys and leave.

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

I do not remember any issues with the communal doors.

(d) Windows, including the window reveals and kitchen extractor fans;

I would refer to the comments in my previous witness statement where I said:

"38. I told the fire fighter that there was a fire in our kitchen or that the fire had come through the kitchen window, I do not remember my exact words but said words to the effect of "there's a fire in our kitchen". Wintom was standing behind me and said "there's fire coming into our kitchen". IWS00000845_0008

"Windows

95. I also had concerns about the replacement windows. The new windows were smaller than the original windows which inevitably led to there being gaps around all of the edges of the windows. Our flat was constantly cold as a draught was coming to the flat from the gaps around the windows. The draught coming through was strong as we could even see the net curtains inside our flat moving with the breeze that was created by the gaps.

96. The window in the kitchen had huge gaps underneath the window ledges, large enough for me to fit my fingers through. I reported my concerns to Linda and her manager, I cannot remember his name.

97. Linda visited the flat to inspect the windows on a few occasions after I complained. On her initial visit, the gaps were clearly visible underneath the window ledges and she therefore arranged for someone to come to the flat and fill the gaps in with silicon. A few days later, I complained again as the draught was still coming through the gaps around the window edges. Linda came back to the flat and placed her hands around the edges of the window and told me that she could not feel anything.

98. I told her that she was not in the flat in the evenings and this is when it was more noticeable. She therefore sent a Rydon employee to my flat for a second time but I could tell she was not convinced. When Rydon came to my flat for a second time, they filled the gaps around the edges with more sealant. I remember them filling the gaps with something but I cannot remember what it was and they then covered this substance with the sealant.

99 This did not resolve the issue and I had to escalate my complaint to Linda's manager, who arranged for Rydon to come back to my flat on a further two occasions to try and resolve the issue. I don't remember his name. After the fourth attempt to try and fill the gaps around the edges, the issue with the draught coming

through had been resolved. The four visits to try and resolve the issue was over approximately two months.” IWS00000845_0018 & 0019

(e) Fire safety signage;

The only fire safety signage that I remember was the fire exit sign.

(f) Escape routes;

I would refer to the comments in my previous witness statement where I said:

“34. When we got on to the landing my daughter started walking to the lift and pressed the button to call the lift and I remember pulling her back and telling her that we needed to take the stairs.” [IWS00000845_0007]

“44. We ran down the stairs and out of the Tower. It only took us a few minutes to exit the Tower. I was in shock and all I could think about was getting out of the flat. I did not realise until we were outside the Tower that my daughter had come out without her shoes.” [IWS00000845_0008]

“45. My memory about exiting the Tower stairwell has almost completely gone; I only remember what happened when we got to the ground floor. [REDACTED] tried to exit the Tower by the fire exit at the bottom of the stairs and just as she was about to walk out of the fire exit, I saw fire and debris falling outside the Tower. I pulled her back and told her that we had to go out of the main entrance.” [IWS00000845_0009]

“60. We were then moved away from the area outside of the Tower by the police not long after Meron came out. The police asked all the residents to give them their names and flat numbers and to move to Clarendon Road where we were told a bus would come and take us away. The bus never did materialise. The second or third time that I spoke with Genet, she asked me to tell the fire fighters to catch her as they were all going to jump from their flat as she said to me that there was no way out.

61. I was distraught and kept telling her not to jump; I was begging her not to jump because I knew that the cladding was on fire and if they did jump they would land in the fire. I spoke to police officers near the police cordon and pleaded with them to do something about Genet's family. I kept telling them that there was a woman stuck in Flat 153 on the 18' floor with two young children and who was about to jump with her family."

[IWS00000845_0011 & 0012]

"77. I have always had a few general concerns about fire safety in the Tower. One of my concerns was in relation to the staircase which was very narrow, i.e. only two people could walk side by side on the stairs and this was also the only staircase in the Tower. It was the only means of escape in the case of fire if we had to leave our flats." *[IWS00000845_0014]*

"78. I was also concerned about there being only one exit out of the Tower given the number of residents in the Tower. I did not consider it sufficient. I had not discussed my concerns regarding the exit with anyone but I was aware that The Grenfell Action Group led by Edward Daffarn and other residents and leaseholders had raised the issue of the single entrance/exit point with the TMO and no action was taken by them." *[IWS00000845_0014]*

"86. My concerns regarding the modifications to the outside of the Tower were that the main contractors overseeing the refurbishment, Rydon had put up a solid fence of wooden boards around the Tower before the refurbishment works had started which left us with only one entrance and exit point in and out of the Tower during the works. I was worried about this as it restricted access for emergency services vehicles to the Tower." *[IWS00000845_0016]*

I would add that the stair way was very narrow and was the only means of escape.

(g) Emergency lighting;

I only remember that the ordinary stair lights were on when we were fleeing from the fire down the communal staircase.

(h) Smoke control or ventilation system;

I was not aware of any form of smoke control or ventilation system. Nobody ever told me about any such systems.

(i) Smoke alarms;

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“26. I now understand that the fire started at 12:54am in the early hours of the morning of 14 June. I was sleeping on the sofa and was woken up when I heard what seemed to be the distant sound of an alarm. When I started to awaken I could smell smoke and I could hear the faint ringing sound which had woken me. At first, I thought that I was imagining the noise but it wouldn't stop and then I realised that I was smelling smoke.

27. I got up from the living room and went straight towards the kitchen. As soon as I opened the kitchen door, I could see the kitchen was full of smoke. The smoke was dark grey in colour but I could still see through it.

28. The ringing noise which I could hear was coming from the carbon monoxide alarm which was sitting on a kitchen shelf. The carbon monoxide detector had been given to us by the Council about 3 years prior to the fire. Council workers had knocked on doors and had handed the devices to residents. I had placed it on a shelf in the kitchen.

“31. The smoke alarms did not go off in the flat. I had two smoke alarms in my flat, one in the corridor and one in the kitchen but they were not linked

up to go off at the same time. I do not know if the alarms were connected to the mains electricity supply or if they were battery controlled. I had never tested the alarms but I knew that the alarm in the kitchen was working as on the Saturday before the fire I had managed to trigger it when I was roasting Ethiopian coffee beans. I don't understand why the alarm did not go off on the night of the fire. The alarm in the kitchen would go off regularly when I was roasting coffee beans. I would then press the button in the middle of the alarm to stop it from sounding.” IWS00000845_0005 and 0006

(j) Boilers

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said the following regarding issues related to the installation of new boilers and their relocation:

“Boilers

91. I had the following concerns regarding the modifications carried out inside my flat. We were initially told by Claire Williams and Rydon that they would be replacing our boilers and the new boilers would be fitted in the kitchen. However, after the refurbishment works started, the TMO and/or Rydon changed their minds and informed us that the new boiler would now be installed in the hallway, just by our front door.

92. I was extremely unhappy with this as I was worried about what would happen if the boiler broke down or exploded. We would be trapped in our flat. The proposed location of the boiler also meant that we would be unable to move large items in and out of the flat as it would have taken up a considerable amount of space in the hallway.

93. The Grenfell Residents Association refused to accept the changes they had announced in relation to the new boilers and insisted that the new boilers be fitted in our kitchens. Some of us were successful in challenging both the TMO and Rydon's decision to install the boiler in the hallway but it had taken several months to reach this point and some of the residents had given up and allowed the TMO and Rydon to fit boilers in their hallway.

94. I recall receiving a visit from Linda, who acted as liaison between the residents and the TMO and Rydon, on the day Rydon were installing my new boiler. Linda came to my flat and tried again to convince me to have the boiler installed in the hallway. She even went as far as saying that she thought the boiler would look really nice in the hallway and that they would build a box around the boiler for me to match the shelving unit which I already had in my hallway. Linda was trying her level best to convince me to change my mind but I refused to do so."

IWS00000845_0017 & 0018

(k) Gas works carried out by Cadent Gas/IRIO at Grenfell Tower.

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said the following regarding issues related to gas:

"Gas

100. Another concern I had with the refurbishment works were the gas pipes which were fitted in the stairwell. I only came to know that these pipes were gas pipes a few weeks before the fire and did not have a chance to discuss my concerns with the TMO . I was obviously worried about there being gas pipes in the stairwell as this was the only way to exit the Tower in the event of a fire.

101. I was told that these pipes were going to be connected to the store rooms in each flat. The contractors had already started to do this on the floors at the top of the Tower and they were working down the Tower floor by floor. They works had not reached my floor.

102. We received a visit from one of the contractors on a Saturday and he in us that that they intended to fit our new gas pipes and gas meter in our store room. I queried this as I did not understand why it was not going to be fitted where the old one was which was in the airing cupboard next to the kitchen. They informed me that there may be asbestos present where the old meter was and they needed to test the area. This was the first time that I was made aware that our flat potentially had asbestos, but the contractors carried out

tests and they came back negative. I was told this immediately after they carried out the test.

103. I told the contractors that I would be requesting that the meter be fitted where the old meter had been positioned given that their tests had confirmed there was no asbestos in the flat.

.....The gas pipes were going to be fed through the ceiling of the communal outside landing.” IWS00000845_0019 & 0020

(l) Other Issues.

I would refer to the other issues I detailed in my previous witness statement:

Electricity

“79. Another concern was in relation to the electricity supply in the Tower. When I lived on the 11th floor, I was constantly having problems with my laptops and phone chargers and I had to replace my laptop and my phone chargers on a few occasions as they stopped working which was unusual and made me question the electrical installation inside my flat.” IWS00000845_0015

80. I had a good relationship with owner of flat 112 and although I rented from the RBKC I would call the owner when I had problems in the flat. I informed the owner about the problems with my laptop and chargers following which he arranged for an electrician to re-wire the flat.

81. I moved to Flat 26 shortly after the flat was re-wired in 2010 and do not know whether or not the problems with the electricity in flat 112 continued after the flat was re-wired.

82. The only experience I have had with regards to electrical problems in Flat 26 was that the light bulbs in my bedroom and the hallway needed replacing at least once a month. Again, I thought this was unusual and I reported this to the Lancaster West Estate Office which was based in the Tower at the time. The TMO

arranged for an electrician to come to our flat to check the electrics. This did not resolve the issue and it continued up until the fire.

83 My niece, Meron who also lived in Grenfell Tower along with a few other friends had informed me that they experienced power surges on a regular basis in the Tower. They all lived on the higher floors in the Tower. I am also aware that a number of residents in the Tower were left with a number of damaged electrical appliances following one of the power surges as this came up during a meeting with the Grenfell Compact Group. [IWS00000845_0015]

Fire Safety Checks/Inspections

5. Please outline your knowledge of fire safety checks/inspections that were carried out at Grenfell Tower.

I am not aware of anyone from the London Fire Brigade (“LFB”), Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (“RBKC”) or anywhere else coming to visit either our flat or the Tower as a whole to carry out safety checks. I work full time so they may have visited the tower while I was at work.

Fire Safety Advice

6. Please outline your knowledge of the “stay put” strategy at Grenfell Tower including whether you were made aware of such a strategy before 14 June 2017 and how you were made aware of such a strategy.

I never received any advice about Stay Put from anyone including RBKC or the LFB. I do not remember any signs advising of the Stay Put policy.

However, I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“76. There was a fire in the Tower in approximately 2008 or 2009 when I was living on the 11th floor. I understand that the fire had started in the bins outside the Tower and had been caused by a lit cigarette. The emergency services were called to the Tower and the fire fighters managed to control the fire and put it out fairly quickly. On the occasion of that fire we were told by the fire fighters to stay in our flats and avoid using the stairwell until the smoke had cleared. I remember there were a lot of fire fighters at the Tower during this incident which was reassuring and made me feel safe, although it did not stop me from worrying about future fires as I lived alone at that time with my two children and I was worried about how I would get out of the Tower with young children in the event of a fire.”

IWS00000845_0014

7. Please outline your knowledge of fire safety advice or communications you received other than the “stay put” strategy, prior to 14 June 2017 and how you were made aware of such advice or communication.

I do not remember receiving any advice in any form regarding fire safety.

8. Please outline any issues or difficulties you experienced with the communication of this fire safety advice (please refer to the two questions above) and whether you were aware of any provisions for such advice to be made available to those with language or other special needs.

I do not have any issues and therefore the communication of it is not applicable.

9. If you are willing to do so, please detail any special needs or vulnerabilities you or members of your family living in Grenfell Tower had which was relevant to fire safety and whether RBKC and/or the TMO was ware of them. Where relevant, please explain how this information was communicated to RBKC and/or the TMO.

Neither me or my family had any special needs or vulnerabilities apart from our child being a minor.

Fire Safety Complaints

10. Please outline any complaints you made to TMO, RBKC or Rydon about fire safety. Please detail how and to whom such complaints were expressed and whether anything was done in relation to those complaints. Please detail your view of the adequacy of the response to those complaints.

I did speak to the person who tried to move the boiler, who I believe was called Claire Williams, of the TMO and Rydon team. I told I did not want it to be moved. I also spoke to the manager of Linda Prentice about the boiler. They all ignored individual concerns and complaints. Therefore, this is why we as residents felt that we had no choice but to join together to make the complaints as a group since this was the only way that RBKC or TMO would listen and take us seriously. This was the main reason and the start of the formation of the resident's group. Even as a group it took months of constant badgering of RBKC and TMO in order to start to get a response to our concerns. I feel that it should not take a group to get a response from the landlord over such serious issues.

11. Please outline your knowledge of any provisions that enabled those with language or other special needs to send and receive communications to the TMO, RBKC and Rydon about fire safety and safety more generally.

We do not have any such issues so this would not be relevant.

Complaints of Disrepair

12. Set out (briefly) a list of any complaints of disrepair made to RBKC/TMO [e.g. leaking, damp/mould, pest infestation]. Refer to any exhibits if contained in housing file. Comment on whether information withheld in housing file.

I did make complaints about the following:

- a) In approximately, October 2010, while I was away, the boiler on the 7th floor burst and started to leak. The water traveled downwards through the flat below the floor of the leak and down into my flat through the ceiling. The water that leaked into our flat damaged our laminated floors, the walls, the ceiling and the airing cupboard.

I called the TMO and complained about the leak and the damage that it had caused. Their response was that if it was a carpet in my flat that had been damaged rather than a laminated floor, they would have replaced it. However, as it was a laminated floor they would not. They refused to provide any logical or satisfactory reason for this refusal, and I believe that they just did not want to pay. They did not refer to any policy or terms of the lease to support their approach. Such a response was normal for them and it always felt that they did not want to take responsibility if it could be avoided.

I stated that above the ceiling and the walls were also damaged by the water. The response of TMO was unbelievable. They said that they would repaint only the damaged parts of the wall and ceiling but not the surrounding areas. This would result in circles of new paint in amongst areas of unpainted ceiling and walls. Anyone with an ounce of common sense would know that this would look terrible. If a builder told you that this is what they planned to do you would think they were joking but with TMO you knew they were being serious and had come to expect nothing less from them. When I complained about how ridiculous this was, they offered the alternative of paying for the paint and that I do the painting myself. I believe that this is not only ridiculous but against the terms of the lease in relation to the duties of the landlord.

Further, as a result of the leak, my dining table was ruined as were the chairs. The water leak also caused my bookcase to fall damaging the bookcase itself and the ornaments that were on it. The TMO refused to pay for any of the damage. All of the communications were over the telephone.

- b) A further incident occurred a few months before the fire; a pipe in the kitchen leaked causing serious water damage. I contacted TMO by telephone and they sent someone who came within a few hours. They turned off the water supply and informed me that it was not considered an emergency and that I could live without water for a few days. They also told me on the telephone that being without water was not considered as a lack of an essential.

- c) Another issue was our bedroom and hallway lights flickering. I reported this to TMO who sent someone over. The person fixed the problem.
- d) On another occasion the toilet in our flat was leaking but I cannot remember the details of that but believe that it was fixed.

13. I made a complaint in writing/orally and I was informed by RBKC/ TMO that....

[Confirm who the complaints were made to, the approximate dates of the complaints and details of any responses received. Also any action taken to resolve the complaint.]

All complaints were made orally over the telephone. I would also speak to Victoria who was part of the Estate Management Board ("EMB") in the concierge. You could tell her about an issue and she would tell TMO. I sometimes told my Housing Office, Janice. The EMB was based opposite Grenfell before the refurbishments but was removed afterwards.

14. I did/did not feel that my complaints were effectively dealt with.

Complaints were never treated properly by RBKC or TMO. I believe that this was the general feeling of all residents due to their experiences with RBKC and TMO.

Disability/Personal Emergency and Evacuation Plan (PEEP) and Other Related Information

15. As stated above our family does not have anyone suffering any disability or other related information apart from our child being a minor.

Additional Questions

16. Did you complain about the building.

We raised the complaints as set out above in relation to the leaks. However, these were not official complaints following any specific procedure as we were not aware that this would be

needed. Nobody in RBKC or TMO advised us that we should take any specific formal steps when we raised an issue.

17. Did you express your concern about the poor energy efficiency of the building (hot in summer, hard to heat in the winter).

When I lived on the now 14th Floor the flat was hot throughout the year but when I moved to the 5th floor it would be cold during winter. It became even colder in the winter after the windows were changed. I mentioned this to Claire Williams. As I have stated above they took steps to reseal it.

18. Did you have any knowledge of the Urban Initiatives Reports.

I did not have any knowledge of the Urban Initiatives Reports. Nobody ever made me aware of them or provided copies of them.

19. Do you know who the members of the residents groups were within the Tower and what views those groups have about the building and what complaints or issues did they put forward.

Firstly, I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said the following:

“Concerns about modifications to the Tower

84. I had several concerns regarding the modifications to the external parts of the Tower, to the internal communal parts of the Tower and to the inside of my flat. I, along with other residents, attended meetings with Clare Williams and Rydon in the showroom flat 145, on the 17th floor.

85 I was a member of the Grenfell Compact Group that was formed following the commencement of the refurbishment works. David Collins and Edward Daffarn had set up the group and David was the Chairperson. We usually made complaints as a group to the TMO and Rydon regarding the refurbishment works, David sent

the emails on our behalf, but there were occasions on which I spoke to Clare Williams of the TMO and Linda Prentice of Rydon, the resident liaison officer between Rydon, the TMO and the residents, at my flat, by phone and during drop in sessions which were held in the showroom flat regarding my concerns.”

IWS00000845_0016

The members of the resident's group that I can remember are Edward Daffarn, Turufat Girma and Mr Shah. I believe Mr Shah kept many important documents. I was aware of some of the issues they raised as they would tell us about before they would approach the RBKC. This included before the refurbishments.

20. Were you ever informed that cladding would be placed on the outside of the Tower.

We were told in general terms that there was cladding after the refurbishments had been started. I seem to remember a few models of various of what the outside of the tower could look like. When we were asked our opinion about the options of the covering of the outside of the tower, it was more in relation to our opinion of what we liked the look off. I believe there were photo pictures of the design of the tower and what it could look like. There were no details or plans about the cladding other than the look of it. I did not know about cladding so just saw it as the covering for the building. No one explained about the potential dangers or how some cladding was safer than others.

(Aftermath) (Module 4)

With regard to Module 4 of Phase II, I have set out below my comments in relation to the issues of concern.

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation.

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

Emergency Shelter

“66. At about 3 or 4 am we sent our children to my mum's house in Ladbroke Grove. They were taken there in a car by Yohannes Tesfaye who is the partner of my niece Meron and who lived in flat 163 on the 19' floor.

67. I with Wintom stayed on Clarendon Road until about 5 am. There were several other residents with us. We were hoping to find information about friends and neighbours. At this point, a lot of the people who were coming out of the Tower were being taken straight into ambulances and we could not see their faces.

68. Lucy wanted to help search for our friends and the missing children and she told me that she would go to the church and nearby places to look for the missing children. We gave Lucy a list of the names of all of the children we wanted her to look for which included, I[ssac], Y[ahya], F[irdous], B[iruk] and J[essica]. She had the names of the children and was going around all of the centres looking for them. She went to Clement James and Latimer Christian Centre and couldn't find any of our missing friends or the missing children.

69. By daylight I was then told that people were being taken to Rugby Portobello and I with Wintom, Meron and Lucy went there looking for our missing friends. I spoke to Genet when I got to Rugby Portobello and she asked me if I[ssac] was there, I told her that we had not found him yet and that we would keep looking. We were told that there were unattended children at the Harrow Club. We went there but did not find any of the children we were looking for. We spoke to the emergency services at the Harrow Club and we asked them if they had seen the missing people

and they had not, we therefore gave them a list of names of all the people who we were aware were still missing.” [IWS00000845_0012 & 0013]

Housing

133. Our housing assessment was completed by an employee of Hackney Council who had been tasked in to assist the RBKC after the fire. The housing assessment forms took several hours to complete and I received a telephone call from the RBKC a few days later informing me that they did not have our assessment forms and told us that we had to complete them again. I asked them what they meant as I had sat down with someone for hours and hours and had given them all the information they needed. I told the RBKC that I did not have time to do this again.

134. I was really stressed about this and contacted Naomi, my key worker who also suggested that I re-complete the assessment in the event that they could not find the original forms. I was really frustrated and I kept telling them to speak to the person who did my assessment. A few days later, I received a call from the RBKC informing me that they had now found the original forms.

135. I am still living in my temporary accommodation as we have been unable to find a property which meets our requirements.

136. I just feel let down by RBKC throughout this whole process.

137. It feels like we are still where we were before the fire, never being listened to and not being understood, more so as we are still in our temporary accommodation. We feel like we are still being ridiculed for the issues we are raising which are serious and important to us in the same way in which we were ridiculed about our concerns before the fire.

138. I would expect RBKC to be more compassionate given the circumstances but this has not been the case. If there was care and compassion they would have listened as we are almost coming up to one year and we still don't have our permanent home.

139. I had written to RBKC after the fire to inform them that we wanted to remain in the area as I did not want them to start looking for properties outside of where we needed to be. I had also provided RBKC with a letter from the Orchestra group which my children have been involved with for the last four years, a letter from the GP surgery as they have always known me to be the person helping my mother with

all of her medical issues, a letter from my employers confirming my part-time hours which I work because of the children, all in the hope that they would find a suitable property in the location that I needed to be in.

140. The first temporary property I was recommended was in Westminster which was nowhere near the kids schools or my work. I informed RBKC that I had completed my housing assessment which made it very clear that I needed to remain in the local area. I therefore refused to view the property in Westminster as this was not a suitable option for us.

141. We have had four housing officers allocated to us throughout this process, we started off with Gareth, Nana, John or Mashur and now we have been allocated Doreen Hall.

142. Doreen is very professional in the way she interacts with us and she is very understanding, honest and open.

143. After the fire, we were living in a hotel for approximately 11 weeks, until the end of August 2017. We accepted temporary accommodation on 17 July 2017 and we had no communication after that from the housing department until I called them to make enquiries and they told me that the re-settlement team would help me with any enquiries

144. I had to call the re-settlement team on numerous occasions regarding the furniture. At first, it felt like we were being understood but things just kept going wrong, for example, John Lewis had run out of the items we needed but the person dealing with our furniture order at RBKC failed to communicate this to me.

145. It was just a frustrating time as the information from RBKC was always incomplete which meant I had to keep going back to them for clarification. I eventually agreed the lump sum payment for the furniture but it took RBKC up to two weeks to make the payment. I remember speaking to my key worker and telling her how frustrated I was as I couldn't even move into the property because RBKC were delaying payment for the furniture

146. We had to sign the tenancy agreement without any furniture as we were told the tenancy agreement had to be signed before any furniture could be ordered. I agreed to this as the children were going away for a week on a music trip and I wanted to try and get everything in the flat ready before they came back as they were due to return to school a few days after returning from their trip.

147. We felt that there was no empathy or compassion from the RBKC or appreciation of the fact that we had lost our homes, our belongings including photographs, furniture, clothes and most importantly, friends and neighbours as a result of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

148. We had many issues in the property, including electrical problems and getting the RBKC to resolve issues for us took far too long. The electrical problems did worry us given what we had just experienced in the Tower and it was not just the oven which was faulty. We also saw actual sparks coming out of the sockets when we plugged in our new laptop. One of the sockets in the bedroom had burn marks around it, and the oven was tripping the whole system each time we switched it on. Alarm bells started ringing for me as I thought we were in danger again but we felt that they just did not care. I remember informing Mashur, our previous Housing Officer, that RBKC had a duty of care as they had placed us in this property and they should ensure all our concerns are dealt with as a matter of urgency, but then only to be told that when we live in a private rented property repairs take longer. Hearing private landlords take longer to deal with issues was not the response we had wanted and expected to hear for all of the concerns to be addressed

149. It took months for some issues we have had in the temporary property to be addressed.” [IWS00000845_0024 & 0027]

“153. Our housing situation is also worrying the children and they constantly ask when we will be in our permanent home, why everything is being taken away and why nothing good happens to us

154. It is really difficult to hear these things from the children. It is my job as a parent to make sure that my children are in a safe, stable and loving family environment Since the fire, we have been unable to do this for them.

155. The children are very upset as they have lost a lot of their friends in the Tower. It has been extremely hard on them. They are saddened by the loss and are struggling to accept that they will never see their friends again. Both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] used to go for swimming lessons near the Tower before the fire and have refused to go back since the fire as seeing the Tower just brings back the pain of losing their friends.” [IWS00000845_0028]

21. Please provide details of any relief centres you visited including details of what emergency relief was provided to you, by who and in what time frame. Specifically, please outline your experiences of:

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“There were several centres which had been opened for the residents of the Tower and it was therefore difficult to obtain information about people who were missing and people had also been taken straight to hospital. We did not get to the bottom of what happened to some of those people until several weeks after the fire.” [IWS00000845_0022]

Turning now to the specific issues raised by Phase II.

- (a) The initial relief centres (such as Rugby Portobello Club, Clement James Centre, Al Manaar Mosque, Latymer Community Church, Notting Hill Methodist Church and the Harrow Club);

We initially went to The Rugby Portobello Club. This was the first relief Centre we went to. The Rugby Portobello Club provided food, coffee, blankets and other help. It was run by and supported by the local community. I believe they also provided an initial gift of £100 for each household. They were excellent.

- (b) The Westway centre;

We also went to the Westway Centre where someone (I am not sure who) had set up help desks for numerous issues that we were facing. For example, the passport office was set up there to help obtain a new passport. Also, there was a place for the children to play while

you were there. I believe that the centre should have been set up sooner as the services offered were things that survivors needed urgently.

(c) Placements in hotels (or otherwise) including:

- i. The time frame within which they were organized;
- ii. Their location;
- iii. Their suitability;
- iv. The accessibility of basic needs at these placements including food/drink/basic provisions/emergency payments/support services.

We were placed in a hotel on the first night as stated above. The hotel was the Premiere Inn in Earls Court where we stayed until the end of August 2017. We would have been stuck there for ages if we hadn't kept pushing RBKC. The time in the hotel was terrible. We had one room for my husband and I and our two children. The children were 11 and 13 years old at the time. We were in one room with one double bed and two single beds. The only other room was a bathroom. There was no cooker. The room was designed for staying in for only short visits, not for a family to live in for such a long time.

The location of the hotel was not good as it was very away from the community and the support which was being provided by various charities. These support centres had been set up near the tower.

With regard to food, on the first night the staff in the hotel provided us with food. They offered a buffet for us and the three or four other survivor families staying in the same hotel. This was organized by the hotel not the council. Nobody from the council checked up on us until someone from Hackney Council carried out an assessment a few days after arriving.

However, as I have mentioned further in this statement, they carried out the assessment and then lost our assessment forms.

With regard to food we knew that we could have breakfast at the hotel, but we did not know if we could have dinner there after the first night. Various charities (I do not know which

ones) delivered hot food to us at the hotel. We also received food from family. However, as time passed by we had no choice but to eat out a lot. Even though it may sound nice to be eating out all the time, this was not the case after a few days especially with children. For the first few weeks we had to pay for the meals that we ate out. We were never refunded.

After a few weeks our Key Worker set up a meal allowance which was where money was paid direct into our bank account.

On the 5th July 2017 the meal allowances started with £1,200 for the family which was transferred into our bank account. This was to cover food and drink for the family.

Food and Drink

22. Please outline your experiences of the provision of food and drink in the immediate aftermath. Specifically:

- (a) The accessibility of food and drink in relief centres and emergency accommodation placements; and

I have referred to these issues above.

- (b) The suitability of the food and drink provided.

I have referred to these issues above.

Basic Provisions and Financial Assistance

23. Please outline your experiences of the provision of financial assistance and basic provisions. Specifically:

- (a) Access to and adequacy of the emergency financial payments;

I would refer to my above answer but would add that from the time of the fire until the 5th July 2017, we did not receive any payments. I believe that once we received the payments they were adequate.

(b) Basic provisions such as clothes and hygiene essentials.

Initially, we received everything that we needed from family and friends who came to the hotel and gave them to us. I am not aware of RBKC taking any steps to help in relation to clothes, hygiene products or any such items.

Psychological Support

24. Please outline your experiences on the provision of psychological and mental health support services. This may include access to social workers, key workers, counselors or other support services.

Firstly, I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“150. The fire has affected us all in the way we live our day to day lives. We make a point to make sure all sockets except for the fridge are switched off when we are not using them; I am constantly telling my children not to use items whilst they are being charged as I am worried the appliances will explode. Wintom since the fire switches off the socket for the oven and hob everyday before we go to bed.”

[IWS00000845_0027]

“The months following the fire

151. Before the fire our children were both very happy and smiley children. [REDACTED] was a very chatty person but now he has become very closed off and very quiet since the fire. He doesn't talk a lot or say much.

152. People always used to say that our children were very happy before the fire, they had big smiles etc. Our family and friends have also noticed that the smiles have gone and

they often say to the children, that they want to see their smiley faces again. [REDACTED] was a very happy child and since the fire she cries a lot, she gets upset very quickly, she is very emotional and she finds all sorts of excuses not to go to bed."

[IWS00000845_0028]

"162. I do not know what the long term effect is going to be on the children. People keep saying that our children are resilient but I don't know if they will be ok and it is very scary knowing that this will scar them for life.

163. I know for a fact that they have both changed and they are not the same children I had before that night. It is still very difficult on all of us, Wintom keeps saying he is fine and he is dealing with it but I know deep down that he isn't ok and he is just trying to be strong for us. Wintom was always working before the fire, he was a workaholic and he just hasn't been able to get back to work properly since the fire.

164. I am finding it difficult to accept that I will never see those who lost their lives in the fire again. Sometimes, I wake up and wonder if this really happened, as there are days where I still can not believe or accept it. I keep walking in the direction of home only to realise when I get there that my home is no longer there. It is the direction I have walked the last 13 years and have just found myself walking there without even realising. I just stand there and look up at the building to see that we have lost our home, our friends, our neighbours." [IWS00000845_0028]

Further, I would add that I have been attending counselling on a weekly basis since September 2017.

Our previous Key Worker that we had initially left, and we were appointed new one. I believe the original Key Worker left as the job became too much. Even when we did have her as she was also a social worker, she often had to attend court to give evidence. This meant that she was very hard to get hold of and often would not be able to answer our calls.

Information and Assistance

25. Please outline your experiences of the assistance that was available to obtain information about missing people and the deceased. This may include assistance received via the Casualty bureau or via Family Liaison Officers.

I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

"The events directly after the fire on 14 June 2017

118. In the days that followed the fire, it was very difficult to find out information about our friends and neighbours in the Tower." [IWS00000845_0022]

"119. It wasn't easy to obtain information about those who were missing as nobody was telling us anything. I knew that people were still missing but hoped that at least if we had information about who was in hospital it would help."

[IWS00000845_0022]

Public Communication

26. Please outline your experiences of how information about services and support available was communicated. Specifically, please detail whether you received any information from the following:

(a) Online through social media/website updates;

We did not use any of these and I am not aware of any such sources as nobody informed us about any.

(b) Leaflets/newsletters;

Initially we did not receive anything but later we would get a leaflet posted through our hotel door giving an update (weekly). However, as there were only three of four families in our hotel from the tower, I think we were forgotten, and we did not receive anything for some time.

(c) Telephone helplines;

I was not aware of any such help lines.

(d) Voluntary relief centres.

We did not receive any specific information regarding these.

Needs of Specific Groups

27. Please outline your experiences of whether the emergency relief response addressed the needs of specific groups. Specifically, how were the needs of specific groups assessed and supported including:

(a) Children and young people;

It does not appear that any special consideration was given by RBKC or TMO towards children. For example, they do not appear to have been prioritised. Children should have been receiving counselling by specialist children trained counsellors immediately after the fire. Also, families with children should have been moved out of hotels immediately.

(b) Elderly people;

This category is not relevant to our family.

(c) Individuals with disabilities;

This category is not relevant to our family.

(d) Faith and ethnic groups.

This category is not relevant to our family.

Voluntary and Community Groups

Before dealing with the specific questions I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

“121. The community really came together and provided us with food and drink at the relief centres. We were asked by RBKC if we had anywhere to stay that night, we told them we did not and answered a few questions, like our family size and the children's ages and then we were told to wait for a phone call. They called us at around 3pm to inform us that they had arranged for us to stay in a hotel.

122. It was not easy getting clothes and shoes after the fire, our friends came to Rugby Portobello with a bag full of toiletries and items of clothing for the children and us.

Initial support

123. In the days following the fire, I spent a lot of time at Rugby Portobello. The volunteers at Rugby Portobello were very compassionate, helpful and supportive. They made us feel very welcome in the centre. They were fantastic. It was just what we needed in the situation that we were in.

124. It was nice to have somewhere close by where we could go for help and support. We became quite familiar with all of the volunteers that worked at the club and they knew what our needs were and were able to make us feel welcome and offered us space in the centre whenever we needed it. Also, clothing was eventually organised for us to go and collect when they had them in Rugby Portobello, it felt like they couldn't do enough for us to be honest.

125. We only went to The Westway to access services and this was helpful as we were able to sort out our passports, replacement bank cards, driving licenses, post etc.

126. There were several problems with the help and assistance we received from the RBKC after the fire. Gareth, an employee of the RBKC was assigned to assist us with our replacement passport applications and he came to Rugby Portobello in the days after the fire. We were also assigned our key worker, Naomi at the same time.

127. Gareth assisted us with completing our passport application forms which were urgent as [REDACTED] had a school trip a few weeks later to France and I did not want [REDACTED] to miss out. I stressed the importance of ensuring we submitted [REDACTED] passport application as soon as possible to Gareth who took our completed forms and asked us to come back with passport photographs. We went to have our photos taken and returned to Rugby Portobello to hand the photos to Gareth so he could send our application forms to the Passport Agency.

128. The following day, we received a telephone call from Gareth informing us that the RBKC were no longer dealing with passport applications and he told us to either go to the Council's office to collect the forms or go and speak with the Passport Agency at The Westway. I can not remember what happened to the forms we had completed with him and I had to sit down and complete new forms for the entire family.

129. Whilst we were with Gareth and Naomi at Rugby Portobello, I told them that I did not have a phone and I that was worried about [REDACTED] not having a phone as we both had lost our phones in the fire. I asked them for a phone and I was given a phone which I couldn't even use as it would not let me top up phone credit. I was fortunate that Rugby Portobello had donated phones to the residents which I was able to access a day or two later.

130. The support from the community and strangers was greater than the support we received from the RBKC." [IWS00000845_0022 to 0024]

"131. We were unable to use our car as the keys were destroyed in the fire. We contacted the Toyota garage to request replacement keys and were advised that the whole lock system had to be changed and the car had to be towed to a Toyota garage which would take some time. When we were living in the emergency hotel accommodation we were having difficulties with transport as the hotel was in Earls Court and the childrens' schools were near Grenfell Tower. The RBKC arranged taxis for us to do the school run but I had to call my key worker every single day to request this service despite them knowing that it was something which I needed everyday, Monday to Friday.

132. It just felt like everything was difficult for us when they could have done things more swiftly. Wintom and I had a lot to sort out as we were homeless and all of our belongings and possessions had been destroyed in the fire. It was our responsibility as parents to try and restore some normality in our childrens' lives and we had to ask family and friends to drive us around as we did not have our car, money or anything." [IWS000008450024]

28. Please outline your experiences of:

- (a) The role that voluntary organizations, charities and faith centres had in the immediate aftermath (including the British Red Cross, relief centres and other organizations);

I believe that the charities took on the role of the state in the event of a disaster. This should have been the role of local and central government. Despite the short notice and the lack of help from government the charities and community were amazing and without them things would have been even worse.

- (b) The coordination and distribution of donations and offers of assistance from the public to those in need.

I believe that the charities did the best they could. The council failed to distribute a full and up to date list of all the residents residing in the tower and which flat they were in. I understand from friends that people were claiming money from the charities by saying that they were from flats they were not. However, without a central record system it was impossible for the charities to do anything else. The alternative would have been that they gave nobody any help.

Coordination and Leadership

29. Please provide your experiences of the coordination role that Central Government, RBKC and the TMO had in the immediate aftermath.

I believe that both local and central government failed totally in coordinating any kind of disaster plan or help for survivors. I do not understand what they were thinking. Even the Prime Minister when she visited avoided seeing the survivors as though we were contagious. It is beyond comprehension and shows a complete lack of responsibility, compassion and a complete failure of duty.

Adequacy of Response and Lessons Learned

30. If not covered above, please provide any observations, based on your experience, on the adequacy of the emergency relief provided and any lessons to be learned for the future.

I believe:

- Landlords of tower blocks should hold up to date data adequate data of residents including who is resident there, any issues they may have, and be quicker to react. There should also be steps/provisions for the sharing of information with charities so that they can help people more effectively, especially if they are doing the job of government.
- There should be a central hub centre for all survivors to go to. In essence a one stop help area where everything they require is available. It should also be open outside of normal working hours.
- Information regarding missing people should be centralized and easily accessible for family members and if possible, for people generally. We spent many days trying to find out information about friends and neighbors.
- RBKC and central government should have been (more) visible immediately to provide help and leadership in times of such a disaster.

- People should have been placed closer together when they were put in hotels. Also, the hotels should have all been nearer to the support networks, such as the Westway.
- Children to be treated as priority and given housing immediately.
- Disabled people should also be treated as a priority.

31. Education/Children (linked to Location):

32. Which schools do the children attend? Provide addresses

With regard to our children I would refer to my previous witness statement where I said:

"5. My son attends school near Grenfell Tower. Wintom is a self-employed private hire School and my daughter attends the School Both schools are in close proximity to.

6. [REDACTED] is in Year 9 at School in the Shepherds Bush/Holland Park area. He had end of year exams in the week after the fire. Wintom and I told [REDACTED] to do his best which was made extremely difficult for him given that he had lost all of his notes and books in the fire. Wintom and I had tried to emphasise that he should not stress over his examinations and just do the best he could.

7. [REDACTED] Head Teacher was extremely supportive and did not want [REDACTED] to be bombarded with questions or be singled out when he returned to school after the fire as he was worried that [REDACTED] might find it overwhelming. I remember [REDACTED] breaking down in tears after coming home from his first day back at school after the fire as people kept asking him questions. The school asked [REDACTED] if there was a particular person he wanted to go to anytime he felt emotional, stressed or overwhelmed and he asked for this to be his Head of Year, [Mr Conway] as they had a good relationship. [REDACTED] was the only child going to the school who had lived in the Tower although 2 other boys, who go to the school and were his friends,

were evacuated from their homes. The school provided [REDACTED] with a new school uniform and also kept an eye on him at school, both in and outside of the classroom. The Head Teacher, Mr [Stubbings] kept us updated by phone about how [REDACTED] was getting on in school until the end of term. Mr [Stubbings] in fact offered to provide us with housing for up to 3 months and another parent at the school offered to let us live in their home for as long as we needed. This kind pastoral care and community support has helped [REDACTED] to try and settle back down to his school studies.

8. [REDACTED] was in Year 6 at her primary school, in Notting Hill at the time of the fire. [REDACTED] was relocated to School in the days after the fire for a few weeks. [REDACTED] had just completed her SAT examinations in the few weeks before the fire and she is now in Year 7 at School in were extremely supportive, not just for [REDACTED] who was a current student but also for [REDACTED], a former student of the school. They provided a room which children at the school could go to when ever they felt upset which [REDACTED] really benefitted from. It was a room which she could go to and relax when things got too much for her. I in fact also went to School when I came to the UK, having first gone to Holland Park School. I grew up in the Ladbroke Grove area and was very pleased that my children were also growing up in an interesting and lively multi-cultural part of West London close to the centre of the city, we used to go to Hyde Park, the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Holland Park, Kensington Memorial Park etc.” [IWS00000845_0001 and 0002]

Wither regard to information about our children I am happy to provide general information to the Inquiry but do not wish to give too many details regarding them.

Our son attends a local school. Our daughter attends a local school. Our son is currently taking his GCSE's. Our son travels to school by bus and our daughter walks. It takes our son about twenty five minutes and our daughter ten minutes.

Our son starts at 8.40am and our daughter starts at 8.30am. They take themselves to school and I finish work early to be there when they get home. Both my husband and I care for them.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed.....

Hiwot Dagnachew

Dated.....16-09-20.....