

Witness Name: Jose Vieira

Statement No.: 2

Dated: 27 February 2020

4/3
Jose

IN THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

PHASE 2 WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOSE VIEIRO, FLAT 46 7th FLOOR

I, Jose Vieira, of [REDACTED] will say as follows:-

1. I am making this statement on Modules 3 and 4 of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I also wish to rely on my Phase 1 witness statement dated 12 October 2018 (IWS00001122) as I covered many of the issues in Modules 3 and 4 in that statement. Where possible, I will identify the paragraphs of my Phase 1 witness statement that correspond with those issues, and add my further comments below. I have been informed 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 have given a witness statement to the Metropolitan Police Service and, as above, to the Inquiry as part of the Phase 1 proceedings.

Module 3

Fire Safety Systems

Lifts

2. I addressed lifts in paragraph 37 of my Phase 1 statement. As I stated, most of the time at least one of the lifts was broken and occasionally both were broken at the same time. The lifts were in poor condition generally, and because from memory the lifts were not refurbished during the works to the Tower, the problems continued after the work finished.

3. Whilst I did not formally complain about the lift, when one of them broke down I would raise the issue with the concierge. When I did raise it with him, it was mainly as a topic of conversation rather than as a formal complaint. Alternatively, if both lifts were broken I would speak to the concierge and ask that the door (the emergency exit) to the walkway be opened. Sometimes there was a sign that the lift was not working. The lifts were in a poor condition. From my memory, the lifts were last refurbished in the 1990s.
4. I recall that the workers that completed the refurbishment used the lift regularly. They had a key that could lock the lift so that it could not be called or moved. They would then use one of the lifts (covered in a tarpaulin) for transporting materials and the other lift would be used by the workers themselves.

Flat Doors

5. I had my door was replaced lots of times. In the beginning of my time in the Tower, my door was replaced lots of times because of burglaries. In about 1980/1981, I had 5 incidents of burglaries in one year. Each time I had a burglary, I had a new door installed.
6. The last door that we had on our flat was installed in about 2007/2008. The door that we had before the new one was installed was made of solid wood, which I assume was not fireproof. I recall that we received a letter from TMO informing us that the door was going to be replaced. I do not recall the reason to replace the door or whether there was a reason contained in the letter we received from TMO. It would not surprise me if there was no reason, as the TMO would not often consult residents but rather would inform them that something was going to happen with very little choice (if any). We then received a form posted through our door asking which type of new door we wanted from a choice of three colours, and a few door options for whether we wanted window panels in the doors and the shape of those panels.
7. There was a self-closing mechanism on the new door, but it was not was a traditional box on the top of the door frame like you see in many office buildings and schools. It

was a concealed chain in about the middle of the door jamb, which connected the door to the door frame. When the door was opened and there was no pressure on it, the door would close automatically. I do not recall that the door was heavy; it did not require a lot of pressure to keep the door open with your body or your foot for example.

8. I did encounter problems with the self-closing mechanism on our new door. A piece of metal, which was from memory a hole which the chain went through, detached either from the door or the frame and started to catch on the door when it was closing (ie the door would not close because the piece of metal was fouling the movement of the door). I pulled that piece of metal off with a hammer to make sure that it closed. After I removed that piece of metal the self-closing mechanism did not work. I did not complain to TMO or anyone else about the door being broken because I was fine with it as I had “fixed it”.
9. I cannot remember whether we had a smoke excluder or smoke seal on the bottom of the front door. What I can remember is that the frame of the front door was in four pieces, that the floor did not form part of the door frame – ie that the door frame was proud of the floor, like a ship.

Communal Doors

10. The communal doors were very thick, and because they were very heavy they required a lot of effort to open and to move. The communal doors, one of which went to the rubbish chute and one to the entry to the staircase, were always functional in my experience (at least on my floor) and functioned without problems. The doors were always shut when I had cause to use them and I cannot recall them being propped open by residents or anyone else.
11. I also recall that the communal doors had self-closing devices on them. From my memory, those self-closing mechanisms were in the traditional style of a box above the door, attached to the door and the door frame with two movable arms. The self-closing devices were different on the communal doors than they were on the door to my flat.

12. The communal exit from the Tower via the walkway was also always closed and could only be opened from the inside as it was supposed to be an emergency exit. From the outside there was no handle and no fob access. Rarely, when both lifts were broken the door from the stairs outside were propped open to allow access to the stairs (see my paragraph on the lifts and the concierge, above).

Windows

13. I addressed the windows in paragraphs 18 – 22 of my Phase 1 witness statement. As I stated in that witness statement, the windows installed were draughty. I remember when I was sitting at the computer, the side of my body closest to the window would be very cold and I could feel a draught coming through the window.
14. In terms of my raising those issues, I recall that staff from Rydon came to knock on our front door. They came to make bookings for when we were available to have work done, and to ask our opinion on how the work was progressing. I spoke to one of the people who came to our door, and told them about the breeze that was coming in from the outside of the Tower through the new windows. I cannot recall exactly when I spoke to the staff about this, or who they were, but I am certain that I spoke to them before the work was completed.
15. It was rectified, from my memory it was rectified relatively quickly, from memory within a couple of weeks. The problem was solved by the plastic strips and the sealant that were used.
16. As mentioned in my Phase 1 statement, there was an extractor fan installed in the window of the kitchen. I cannot recall when that extractor was installed, but I am sure that it was not long after the installation of the new windows in the kitchen and in the rest of the flat. It could have been no more than a month or 2.
17. The extractor had two switches. The fan was turning most of the time even when it was not switched on, spinning with the wind, I presume, to allow air to circulate into the flat. There was a wire coming from the fan to a switch above head height, out of reach, which would turn the fan on. Then, directly below that switch and just at torso-

level was another switch, connected to the first and labelled 'Booster' which I used when there was a lot of smoke in the kitchen. The top switch needed to be turned on in order for the booster function to work. I recall having to stand on a chair to turn the top switch on in order to use the bottom switch.

18. The extractor made a ticking noise which was very annoying. It was not very loud but it was constant and it was noticeable, even when it was not very windy outside.

19. I did complain to the workers about the ticking noise (I cannot remember to whom or how ie in the office or to the people that knocked on our door). After I made the complaint, someone did come round to check on the extractor. I told the person that it was making an annoying noise. They turned it on and checked it. At one point (I cannot remember when) they mentioned that they were going to replace a part in the extractor – I recall someone mentioning a manufacturing problem – but I cannot recall whether any work took place after that to replace the fan and I cannot recall anything further about the fault.

Fire safety signage/escape routes/emergency lighting/smoke control or ventilation systems

20. I was not aware of any issues in relation fire safety signage, escape routes, emergency lighting and smoke control or ventilation systems. I did not know anything about the installation or function of those systems. I did not make any complaints about them or speak to the landlord or any other authority.

Smoke Alarms

21. I addressed the fire alarms in our flat in detail in paragraphs 12 – 14 of my Phase I witness statement. I think that the smoke alarm in the corridor was battery powered or at least it was hardwired had a battery backup. I recall that it started to beep to indicate that the battery was dying. I went to the TMO office to tell them about the battery, and to ask that they arrange for it to be changed. They asked the porter; and the porter said that the batteries in the smoke alarms were the tenant's responsibility.

22. I remember that I could not change the battery in one of the smoke alarms. I tried and I could not get the cover of the smoke alarm open. My son came to change, and then he did it successfully.

Gas Works

23. I addressed the gas works carried out in paragraphs 23 – 27 of my Phase 1 statement. I did have issues with the pipes; when they were installed, no cover was put over any pipes on the floor and hung from the wall. Two pipes hung one under another, they could have been installed side-by-side and tight to the ceiling but they were not. I complained and Rydon staff agreed to cover the pipes. The box that they installed to cover the pipes was very big and protruded from the ceiling approximately 10 – 15cm down. I do not think that the same standard of work would occur in a private dwelling not owned by the Council, instead I think that they would have paid more attention to the residents' opinions and would have been more thoughtful in the work that they did. The box that was installed was big and it was close to the smoke alarm. I was also concerned that it would prevent smoke from reaching the smoke alarm though I did not raise this.

Fire safety checks/inspections

24. Save for the visit over 10 years ago regarding my fire alarm (please see paragraph 14 of my Phase 1 statement) I was not aware of any fire safety checks or inspections.

Fire safety advice

25. I addressed fire safety information in paragraphs 7 – 11 of my Phase 1 witness statement. Regarding the “stay put” policy I am sure that there were details on a sign on the ground floor. The sign I remember stating that there was a ‘stay put’ policy was in the Ground floor lift lobby. I am not sure whether the stay put policy was there from the beginning of my tenancy in the Tower in the 1970s, because there was a fire assembly point and there would not be a fire assembly point if the advice was to stay in the flat. I recall that the fire assembly point was the old Council office. I cannot remember whether the fire advice regarding the assembly point became obsolete and whether it existed at the same time as the ‘stay put’ policy. Regardless of the advice I

received from notices or from the landlord, I still would have evacuated quickly because of my experience at work, as mentioned in my Phase 1 statement.

26. Regarding my experience of receiving fire safety advice, though I am a native Spanish speaker I can read English well. It of course would have been easier if the information was available in another language. In any event, I am a native Spanish speaker. I can read English well and I do not consider that me or my family had any special needs or vulnerabilities which were relevant to fire safety.

Fire safety complaints

27. I did not make any complaints about fire safety. I have no knowledge of any provisions that enabled those with language or other special needs to send and receive communications to the TMO, RBKC and Rydon.

Module 4

28. I addressed the issue of emergency relief from central government, local government and the TMO in paragraphs 29 – 37 of my Phase 1 witness statement.

Emergency Shelter and Accommodation/Food and Drink

29. During the day of 14 June 2017 we went to the Rugby Portobello Club; we had heard by word of mouth that it was the place to go to in order to write your names on the wall to indicate that we were safe and in order to meet other residents from the Tower. Rugby Portobello was only allowing residents of the Tower to come in so it felt private and safe, friendly and quiet. There was someone on the door who would ask whether you were from the Tower or not, and the safety of that area for us was helpful.
30. During the chaos everywhere else, Rugby Portobello was a safe haven for us. There was food there, there were drinks there and clothes were starting to be distributed very quickly. My experience was very positive, and so was that of my wife and my

daughter. The staff were very good, they were friendly and understanding. They were helpful. It was calm there at a time when everything else was not. Rugby Portobello also provided information for us, and it was there that we first started to be told about accommodation and where we would be staying. During the first week, we were at the Rugby Portobello quite a lot. We were there, in-and-out, a lot during the day.

31. We also attended Latymer Community Church on 14 June 2017. I remember that they offered us water, and that there were a lot of people coming and going there. Piles of clothes were being arranged as they were being donated, and we were asked if there was anything that we needed. Because it was open to all, unlike Rugby Portobello, it was busier and there were a lot of people there – volunteers and other people from the community. The business made it more difficult to find information, to see people, to see who was safe and to figure out a path and your next steps. I received counselling from a woman at the Latymer Community Church, which I will never forget. I was in a bad place that day, and she sat with me for a long time. I am very grateful for that. It was a different type of help in Latymer Community Church, but it was help nonetheless and it was good help.
32. We attended the Westway Centre approximately 5 or 6 days after the fire. I had heard from somebody in Rugby Portobello – possibly another resident of the Tower but I cannot be sure – that there were people providing assistance with paperwork in the Westway Centre, such help with driving licences, formal ID documents and passports, benefits and pension and government departments. I think that there was a TFL person there too giving out Oyster cards, and there was Royal Mail kiosk there to redirect post. It was more organised; you would receive a wristband and there were greater resources there to help out.
33. We stayed in the Holiday Inn Express in North End Road from the night of 15 June 2017 until 26 December 2017. It was a long spell to stay in a hotel as a guest. It was arranged not by RBKC but by Rugby Portobello, I assume paid for by RBKC. It was close enough in a way but it was a different place altogether. The hotel was suitable, it was a small room but it was clean and it was comfortable. There was no food in the hotel, only breakfast – we had to eat elsewhere in local restaurants or takeaways. It felt crazy ringing someone asking for food. When we lived at Grenfell Tower, my

wife and I did not get takcaways or go out for dinner ever. It was a big shock for us to have to eat in local takeaway shops and restaurants.

34. At the start, we paid for all food ourselves. A few days later, someone from The Samaritans gave us vouchers provided by Hammersmith & Fulham Council to exchange for food in local takeaways and restaurants. It was a long time for us, probably a few months, before we could stop using vouchers. After that we had a cash card provided by RBKC. The Samaritans were there for nights and nights to talk to people. They were quite prominent in that hotel and they were involved in more than just distributing the food vouchers.

Basic provisions and emergency payment

35. The Rugby Club gave us some emergency financial help on the second day, 16 June 2017. I do not think that the money was from RBKC but rather from voluntary donations from members of the public that they distributed. I recall that it was £500. That money was for me and my family and we each received cash.
36. A few days later I got another £300 for food, other essentials and for glasses from Rugby Portobello (I am a full-time glasses wearer and I had lost my glasses in the Tower and did not have any). I then had to go to the optician to order new glasses. I had no problems with that but I was without glasses for 10 days. They also gave me a cheap mobile phone.
37. I believe that I received money another once or twice but I cannot remember when or from whom. It was not particularly large sums of money at this stage
38. We received money from government within a week of the fire. That was organised through Rugby Portobello. It was a larger sum of money than the cash payments we had been given by Rugby Portobello and other voluntary organisations, so it was transferred into my bank account (I am lucky that I had managed to leave with my bank cards). Because it was a larger sum of money (I believe it was £5,000) I remember that we had to sign for it.

39. I do recall that emergency payments were easily accessible; there was money there. I did not feel as though we were short, though it was the only in the weeks and months after the fire that receipt of money started to come from more formal sources. Though the payments were enough, nobody officially came to us and told us that there was money available; we had to find out that emergency payments were available through word of mouth. It would have been difficult if we did not know anybody.
40. There were clothes available everywhere we went. Half of Rugby Portobello was full of clothes. I was careful not take anything I wouldn't use, I did not want to take something just for the sake of it, but also I was in a small room in a hotel with no room for my wife and I to store many clothes.
41. Hygiene essentials: there was lots of stuff at Rugby Portobello and the Westway Centre. People had donated loads of toiletries, it was like going into a supermarket: shampoo, conditioner, soaps, creams etc., everything that you needed. Even sometimes, if there was something you needed that was not there you could just ask for it and they would get it for you.

Psychological Support

42. All I can say is that as far as I was aware, psychological support was always available if you needed it. A lot of people came to the hotel to see if we needed any support, and they were still some people there even as we moved out (which was Boxing Day). I did not seek out support of that type, so I cannot comment on quality, but it seemed available.

Information and Assistance

43. It was a long time (more than a week), before we found out how many people had died. I remember people asking everyone they could how many people had died in the Tower; we did not know for a while and people were demanding answers. We knew about our friends from inside the Tower relatively quickly, either by contacting them or them contacting us, writing names on the wall in Rugby Portobello or bumping into them directly or others. I was wondering about people that I did not know directly or by name but did talk to; I did not know whether they had made it out. I do not

know anything about the Casualty Bureau, and we did not have a Family Liaison Officer until a while after the fire.

Public Communication

44. We did not receive any information about services or support online through social media or by website update. I am not particularly computer literate and it would not be my first instinct to seek information like that online. Most of the people that passed me information about services and support had received that information online. They would tell me that something was available (for example a support payment) and that they had learned about it online.
45. We started to receive newsletters a long time after the fire. It was probably a couple of weeks. Soon after the fire we started to receive newsletters and leaflets from RBKC in the hotel about meetings that were taking place and stating what kind of help was available. I do not believe that we received information this way until more than a couple of weeks after the fire.
46. I did not use any telephone helplines to seek information about or access to any support. I am aware that there were telephone help lines available but I did not use them simply as I did not need the assistance that they were offering.
47. As above, the majority of the services and support we knew about and that we utilised was communicated to us from voluntary relief services and the various centres that were used by the residents of the Tower. In particular, most of the information was received from either Rugby Portobello (who would call or text about something individual to us, and sent general information by email).
48. I have to say that the most consistent and reliable form of information communication was by word of mouth. I learned about most of the services I used and the support I accessed through people we knew from the Tower. Like most things nowadays, you do it online or you do not do it. It would be much worse if I did not have my daughter with me because she is computer literate and was able to contact key workers,

complete the online application for and viewing of housing (an online portal), arranging meetings and coordinating things. Back then, the more you shouted the more you got. We were lucky enough to find out about some information. For example, I did not have WhatsApp before the fire. I lost my phone in the fire and I received a phone from Rugby Portobello which could not go on WhatsApp. I understand from my daughter and from other people that I have met since that the main form of communication between residents was via WhatsApp. I did not have it before the fire and I could not access it in the immediate aftermath.

49. If my English was not as good, if I did not have the support of my friends and family around me, I would not have received the amount or quality of the help and support that I received. In order to receive information about services and support you had to be proactive; it was all received through the grapevine and by word of mouth. You did not want to feel left out and miss something, so within the chaos you had to try. Some weeks there were meetings every evening; and we would often bump into someone who had not attended a meeting because they simply had not heard about it.

British Red Cross

50. I remember the BRC being in the Westway. I did not like what they were doing. They marked us like we were going into a concentration camp. They gave you a wristband which was coloured differently every day; and every day you had to register to get into the Westway Centre. It had your name on it and each wristband had an individual number. You were marked and easily identifiable when you walked down the street. We were so used to the Rugby Portobello where it was informal. The last thing you wanted to do is go through that official layers of management. The help available was great, and it was well-managed, I just did not like the formality required to get inside.

Coordination and Leadership

51. As far as I am aware, there was no coordination role. I saw central government in that there was support available from the Home Office, DVLA, DWP (in terms of payments) but I did not see any coordination. I did not see TMO at all. I did not hear

from them. I had to contact TMO to get my car out of the garage. What they were doing in Westway was good evidence of a coordination role. We had a key worker, from Enfield seconded to RBKC. My daughter received a text message on 20 June 2017 which was the first time we had heard from a key worker. Our key worker was our primary point of contact if any issues came up. We had to chase a lot. Afterward the keyworker changed a couple of times.

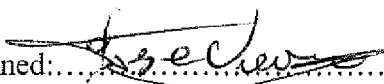
Adequacy of Response

52. Someone should have been there on the night of the Fire. Someone should have been there the next day at the latest to residents who is in and out of the Tower and who were there. Not everyone could have registered with the voluntary services.

53. I did not hear any information at all from TMO. You've lost people you know and you've lost your house and oyu still have to sort out papers and emails and meetings that you don't understand. We had to attend so many meetings. I remember seeing the faces of people who had found a name of someone they were looking for on the wall, of someone who had made it out. The look of relief will stay with me, and it could have been sorted out so quickly if they had come with a list.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed: 

Jose Vieiro

Dated: 4-3-2020