

**Witness Statement of: Sharon Laci**

**No. of statement: 2**

**Exhibits:**

**Date of statement: 05.03.20**

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHARON LACI**

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

Signed: S. Laci

I, **SHARON LACI**, will say as follows:

1. I am a survivor of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017. My daughter and I lived at Flat 65. I am making this statement for the purposes of Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry only.
2. I made a statement in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dated 28 June 2018 with exhibits **SL/1-9** (URN: **IWS/818 & IWS/808-816**). I also gave three statements to the Metropolitan Police dated *30 June 2017, 8 July 2017 and 14 November 2017*.
3. My Phase 2 statement addresses the issues within module 3 (fire safety within the Tower and communication with residents) and module 4 (aftermath) from the Inquiry's Phase 2 schedule. I deal with issues relating to module 3 at paragraphs 4-16 and module 4 at paragraphs 17-71. This statement should be read in conjunction with my Phase 1 statement, which also touches on module 3 and 4 issues.

### MODULE 3

4. As already covered at paragraph 5 of my Phase 1 statement, I signed a secure tenancy agreement for Flat 65 at Grenfell Tower on 1 June 2017 with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC).
5. On 1 June 2017, I remember being shown round the flat by Moira, who was from the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO). She gave me the keys to the flat and a short explanation about the tenancy. I then signed all the relevant paperwork including the tenancy agreement with Jan Jones at the TMO office near the Tower. At paragraph 15 of my Phase 1 statement, I describe being given a welcome pack.
6. At no stage did anyone at the TMO give me any advice about what to do in the event of a fire. I do not remember being given any fire safety information. I was not aware that there was a formal '*stay put*' policy at Grenfell Tower.
7. My daughter and I moved into the flat on or around Sunday 5 June 2017, which was 9 days before the fire. We were both excited to be moving into our new home.
8. I deal with the communal area at Grenfell Tower at paragraphs 6-7 and 18-19, the flat at paragraphs 8-12 and fire safety at paragraphs 14-17 of my Phase 1 statement.
9. I specifically deal with the lifts at paragraphs 6 and 18-19 of my Phase 1 statement. When I moved to Grenfell Tower on 5 June 2017, the left lift was not working. I did not make a complaint to the TMO about this.
10. I deal with the door to the stairs on the ninth floor at paragraph 7 and the flat's front door at paragraph 11 of my Phase 1 witness statement. When I made my Phase 1 statement, I could not remember if the front door was self-closing. However, my police statement said that my front door did not shut automatically, so it remained open. Given that my police statement was made shortly after the fire, I believe this must be correct.
11. I was not aware of any issues with the windows, they all opened in the flat.

12. As already stated at paragraph 16 of my Phase 1 statement, I do not remember any fire safety signs at the Tower. I describe the main stairs running through the middle of the Tower at paragraph 20 of my earlier statement. The stairs was the only way in and out of the Tower.
13. I do not know if there was any emergency lighting in the Tower.
14. I do not remember if there were any smoke control or ventilation systems in the communal area. I have dealt with smoke alarms at paragraph 12 of my Phase 1 statement. There was at least one smoke alarm in the hallway of Flat 65, there may have been one in the kitchen, but I cannot remember. I know the smoke alarm in the hallway was working as it went off on the night of the fire. For further details about this are at paragraph 31 of my Phase 1 statement.
15. I did not have any fire safety concerns before the fire on 14 June 2017. I had issues with the gas and electricity meter and not having any hot water, which I have already described at paragraphs 21-24 of my Phase 1 statement.
16. On 12 June 2017, I called the TMO customer service phone line as there was no hot water. I chased them up on the phone and the TMO sent out an engineer on the afternoon of 13 June 2017.

#### **MODULE 4**

17. Paragraphs 29-54 of my Phase 1 statement describes my recollection of events on 14 June 2017. I will not go into more detail here, except to say that I breathed in smoke, when I opened my front door to firefighters. I also now understand that my daughter and I were the only survivors to be given breathing apparatus (BA) by firefighters to enable us to escape the Tower.
18. The conditions in the communal landing and the stairwell were terrifying. I have never been so scared or frightened in my entire life. I was also fearful about my daughter's safety.



19. Once my daughter and I were outside, I saw the full horrors of the fire. The Tower looked like a torch. I knew immediately that we had lost everything and we would not be going home. There was debris falling from the Tower onto the ground.
20. Paramedics had set up an area by the Kensington Leisure Centre. Whilst waiting to be checked over, it was people from the local community that came and offered us blankets. We stayed there for at least a couple of hours before we were allowed to leave.
21. My daughter and I made our way to my brother's house, who lives nearby. We must have arrived before six o'clock as I remember watching the news at that time. I did not sleep at my brother's place.
22. I briefly describe what happened after we escaped the fire at paragraphs 55-57 and the impact the fire on me and my daughter at paragraphs 58-60 on my Phase 1 statement.

#### Emergency Shelter and Accommodation

23. My number one priority was looking after my daughter and keeping her safe.
24. Early in the morning, one of my brother's neighbours told me that help was available at the Latymer Christian Centre. I must have arrived there before 9am, as I called my daughter's school around that time, to tell them that she would not be attending.
25. There were already loads of donations at the centre. I assume these had come from locals, who generously donated clothes, toiletries and food. I do not know what I would have done without the kindness of strangers. I had only taken my phone with me as I was leaving my flat, I therefore had no accessible money with no bank cards or identification and no clean clothes. My daughter and I did not have the most basic of toiletries such as a toothbrush or shampoo.
26. I remember there was a team of people from Latymer, who took down your contact details, which I provided. They were also offering some advice about what to do next, but I cannot remember what was said. I did not meet anyone from RBKC at the Latymer Christian Centre.

27. I am a little hazy about how I found out about the Rugby Portobello Club and the next sequence of events, but I think someone must have told me that RBKC was there and could help with accommodation. I needed somewhere to stay as my brother's place was too small. He was already living there with his three children and there was no room for me or my daughter.
28. I went to the Rugby Club in the afternoon. When I arrived, I saw lots of residents and volunteers. It was very chaotic. I was told that RBKC representatives were upstairs. I recognised one on them as my previous housing allocation officer. He asked where I was staying and said RBKC would call me if they found somewhere for us to stay. RBKC did not appear to have a clear plan about where they were going to place everyone after the fire.
29. That night my daughter and I had nowhere to go. Esta, who was a volunteer at the Rugby Club, invited us to stay in her spare room for the night. She lived a couple of streets away from the Tower in the direction of Ladbroke Grove. She also found some toiletries and a change of clothes for us at the Rugby Club. I will never forget Esta's kindness. We are now friends and still stay in contact.
30. The next day I was told by RBKC that my daughter and I had a room at the Holiday Inn in Earl's Court. We did not have a choice about the hotel, but RBKC offered to pay for a taxi to take us there. However, I felt more comfortable with Esta taking us in her car.
31. I think my daughter and I stayed at the Holiday Inn for around a week or two. We stayed in the same twin room throughout; it was situated on the third or fourth floor. It was a little cramped for the two of us, but I was grateful to have a roof over our heads.
32. There were a lot of people from the Tower staying at the Holiday Inn and often I would receive updates and information by chatting to them at the hotel. I would also receive information at the relief centres that I attended, which I describe in more detail below.
33. The staff at the hotel were really helpful. They provided a room downstairs for donations to be stored for residents. We needed food, clothes and toiletries after losing

everything in the fire. Volunteers also came to the hotel offering to pick up food and to check on us, which was very kind.

34. Whilst at the hotel, my daughter and I spent a lot of time with either my mother in Ladbroke Grove or my brother, who lives close to the Tower. My daughter and I would often eat with my family as there were no cooking facilities at the hotel.
35. My family was fantastic during this difficult and uncertain time. They were there for me emotionally and financially.

### Relief Centres

36. Whilst at the Holiday Inn, I kept returning to the relief centres for updates. I went to the Rugby Club most days. I also went to the Westway once or twice a week. I preferred the Rugby Club, which felt small and intimate. The Westway was more formal and you had to wear a wristband.
37. In the first seven days, I received £200-£250 emergency cash from RBKC at the Rugby Club. I used this to buy essentials items for me and my daughter that we had lost in the fire.
38. On 16 June 2017, I turned up at the Rugby Club in a panic, when I realised my daughter and I had no formal identity documents to prove who we were. Someone from RBKC helped me make an application for replacement birth certificates.
39. Later I applied for replacement passports for my daughter and me at the Westway. I also went there to redirect my post and to find out more about the support relating to temporary accommodation. I remember TfL helped me with a replacement oyster card. There were lots of different organisations with stands offering help to those affected by the fire. I found it helpful that there were all in the same place.
40. I knew there was counselling available at the Westway, but I did not engage. I was more focused on the practicalities of trying to rebuild mine and my daughter's life and finding a home. Also the counselling services never felt very private at the Westway with everyone there.



41. The other relief centres I attended included the Clement James Centre on two occasions shortly after the fire. Later I went to the Curve, when it opened, but only on a handful of occasions.
42. Once I moved to temporary accommodation with my daughter and returned to work, I did not require the same level of support. Therefore I did not visit the relief centres as much.
43. On my return to work, my employer was supportive. They would let me work from home if I needed and gave me time off to attend meetings connected with the fire. They also arranged a Crowd Funding page for me and gave me clothes, toys, books and other items. My daughter and I were very grateful for their generosity.

#### Temporary and Permanent Accommodation

44. On 19 June 2017, I was contacted by RBKC, who came to the hotel to discuss my housing requirements. I asked to be close to my daughter's school and to my mother, who helped look after my daughter.
45. It was around this time that Prime Minister Theresa May promised that everyone from Grenfell Tower would be rehoused in the next three weeks, yet many residents were in hotels for months and months after the fire.
46. I was keen to leave the hotel as soon as possible. I took the first place that RBKC offered me. It was a two bedroom flat in Paddington, which was in a good location for us. I think we were one of the first to move into temporary accommodation after the fire.
47. My daughter and I moved our permanent home on 11 November 2017.

#### Information and Assistance

48. As already stated, most of the information I received was through going either to the relief centres or talking to other residents from the Tower. I do not remember any telephone helplines. I am not on social media, so I do not know what information was available online. I remember there were newsletters at the Curve telling you about

different services and support available and about future meetings taking place. I do not know who produced these leaflets. I do not remember any leaflets at the Rugby Club or at the hotel.

49. After the fire, I found out that there was a strong Filipino community living in Grenfell Tower. One Filipino families was also staying in the Holiday Inn and I would see others at the relief centres. People in the Filipino community always look out for one another, so we always tried to share information between us. This was to ensure that we all had access to the same support and services.
50. I think the level of support people received would also depend on their personal circumstances, including whether they had friends and family nearby.
51. At first there was little communication from RBKC, but this improved after I was assigned a key worker around seven days after the fire. The first key worker was brought in from another Local Authority for the first couple of weeks.
52. I found it helpful to have a single point of contact. The three key workers assigned to me were helpful and informative. They regularly kept me updated by telephone and email about what support and services were available. However, I know other people had very different experiences with their key workers.

#### Co-ordination and Leadership

53. RBKC did not show any leadership immediately after the fire.
54. There was no planning or co-ordination at ground level to ensure that everyone in the Tower was accounted for and had a bed for the night on 14 June 2017. It was volunteers and survivors from the Tower, that started a list of names and flat numbers on the wall at the Rugby Club, to try and work out who was safe and who was missing. I would have expected RBKC to have co-ordinated this.
55. RBKC's management was nowhere to be seen or heard, instead it was their front line staff that was sent to try and help us. They tried but they were out of their depth and it



was shambolic. Instead it was volunteers and the local community that pulled together to help support us.

56. I think it would have been helpful if one place had been set up for everyone to go for information and support after the fire. I would go to both the Rugby Club and the Westway because you would receive different information and support at each venue.

57. RBKC also needed to be much more organised and consistent with their communication to those affected by the fire.

#### Grenfell United (GU)

58. I believe Grenfell United was formed by residents and the bereaved due to the vacuum that had been created due to a lack of leadership and co-ordination by RBKC.

59. Although I am not able to attend all of the meetings, Grenfell United gave us a voice and was an important source of information, especially through their newsletters, which kept us updated about what support was available. I felt Grenfell United worked really hard to support us all.

60. Many of us felt helpless having lost family, friends and neighbours as well as our homes. At the beginning there was a lot of frustration and upset from people as it was felt that RBKC was not listening. RBKC assumed that they knew what was best for us rather than actually asking what we wanted and needed. For example, residents were angry that RBKC had set up the Curve without any consultation with them.

61. Many people felt they had no control over what was happening to them after the fire. There was no choice about where to live or cook immediately after the fire. Grenfell United brought us together and gave people a focus.

#### Needs of Specific Groups

62. I do not think RBKC gave any special consideration to my daughter's welfare immediately after the fire. They were not able to find us a hotel on 14 June 2017, when

we had nowhere to go. They did send a social worker to check on my daughter, but this was a little while after the fire.

63. My daughter's school was really supportive; she started seeing an art therapist and received extra tuition. Grenfell United also set up activities for children, including an afternoon science club, which my daughter wants to go to.

### Ongoing Impact

64. As with my Phase 1 statement, I do not want to go into detail about the impact the fire has had on my daughter and me.

65. Immediately afterwards, my daughter was clingy. I suffered from a cough and was a little breathless compared to before. I contacted my doctor over concerns about smoke inhalation. I also saw a respiratory consultant.

66. I am very worried about the long term health implications after breathing in smoke and toxins on the night of the fire

67. Emotionally there have been times when I have felt overwhelmed and anxious. I have had difficulty sleeping. Sometimes I would hear firefighters banging on my door in my sleep. I attended one session of Talking Therapy at St Charles.

### Finally

68. In July 2017, police told me a man claimed to be living in my flat at the time of the fire. This was not true. I found it really upsetting that people were trying to take valuable resources and funds away from people that needed it the most.

69. I have already dealt with RBKC's lack of leadership and co-ordination above. I hope there is never another Grenfell, but in the future it is important that RKBC and others have a plan. They need to be on the scene straight away to understand what help is needed and by whom. They needed to ensure that emergency shelter could be provided quickly for those who needed it. Providing information and updates is really important

as well as engaging with those affected. I felt that RBKC was not prepared and slow to react to the Grenfell Tower fire.

70. I find it shocking that Grenfell Tower did not have sprinklers or a communal fire alarm. I also do not remember any fire extinguishers in the Tower. I do not understand why these basic fire safety measures were not in place as it would have saved more lives on 14 June 2017.

71. The Grenfell Tower fire had devastated so many people's lives and scarred the entire community. I hope that the Inquiry will bring about real change for the future and that there is accountability.

### **Statement of Truth**

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

I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed: *S. Laci*

Dated: *5/3/2020*