

RE: Fire safety etc

From:

cllr.blakeman@rbkc.gov.uk

To:

[REDACTED]

Cc:

[REDACTED] steven.cunningham@london-fire.gov.uk,
srumble@kctmo.org.uk, rblack@kctmo.org.uk, chiefex@rbkc.gov.uk, laura.johnson@rbkc.gov.uk,
jwray@kctmo.org.uk, cllr.coleridge@rbkc.gov.uk, cllr.atkinson@rbkc.gov.uk, cllr.foreman@rbkc.gov.uk, Colin Chiles
<colinchiles@leadbitter.co.uk>, Liz Jeffs <lizjeffs@leadbitter.co.uk>, cllr.dentcoad@rbkc.gov.uk

Date:

Wed, 20 Feb 2013 14:57:39 +0000

Dear Francis

I am sorry you have taken my e-mail personally and I will give you the courtesy of a response.

1. Evidence to support my "accusations" can be found in the very significant body of e-mails sent to me and to Council officers and contractors on behalf of your Group - usually but not exclusively from Mr. Daffarn - over a very long period of time. You may re-read them at your leisure. As is evidenced by your reply to me, what may be written by one individual can be read by the recipient as an attack upon their good faith and I certainly feel targeted personally by the tone of these e-mails, since most were addressed to me and not to the other two Notting Barns ward councillors.

2. The Notting Barns Ward councillors - and the whole Labour Group - have never said anything other than that we support the development of a secondary school in North Kensington and this was clearly set out in the election literature that we circulated across the whole of Notting Barns ward prior to the 2010 Council elections. That desperate need for local school places over-rides many other considerations. As a Group of Labour councillors we have articulated this need for well over 15 years, supported by clear demographic evidence of the ever increasing need for local secondary school places. It is not our responsibility that the ruling Conservative Group rejected our representations until it was almost too late to obtain the funding that had been available for a long time. Had the Conservatives listened to us earlier, they would have had enough time in which to identify a site more suitable than Lancaster West for the school. I understand why you were not able to attend the consultation event at the Methodist Church last October with representatives from the Aldridge Foundation and the Council's Family and Children's Services Department. I know that Mr. Daffarn did represent your group at that event, but he only stayed for a few minutes. This was a pity, since it was a wonderful event, extremely well attended by parents and children, all of whom were enthusiastic and welcoming of the new school. A very significant number of those families are residents of Lancaster West Estate.

3. I do not know if you were around at the time when the Lancaster West Estate was built. I was, and know that it was a massive inconvenience to very many local residents over a much longer period of time than the two years anticipated for the

Kensington Academy and Leisure Centre development. At the end of that massive disruption, residents had a new estate providing almost 1,000 new homes for vulnerable families and individuals who were in desperate need of them. Similarly, late in 2014, residents of North Kensington will have a desperately needed brand new secondary school for their children, who will no longer have to travel outside the borough - sometimes for more than an hour each way - often to receive an education inferior to that provided in Kensington and Chelsea. There will be a new Leisure Centre and larger café; new windows for Verity Close; some new social rented homes for vulnerable families; new windows and heating at Grenfell Tower; a better-sited, well-equipped playground and greatly improved nursery for the Grenfell Under Fives; a new home for the Boxing Club that will meet Amateur Boxing Association recommended standards; a much improved environment around the base of Grenfell Tower; a more secure pathway across the Estate that will be well lit and much more secure after dark; and improvements to the garages beside Grenfell Tower. I think most of your neighbours would be very surprised if they heard that their local Labour councillors were opposed to these developments. It is correct that the two Labour councillors voted against the grant of planning permission at the Major Planning Development Committee, but that was solely based on the proposed overdevelopment of the site with the inclusion of 32 housing units for market sale. This made a mockery of the earlier claims that only the Lancaster West site was large enough for the new Academy and Leisure Centre and we foresee very significant car parking problems for local residents and the users of the Academy and Leisure Centre once the development is completed.

4. You are well aware, because you have been copied into the correspondence, that I have persistently raised the difficulties that have arisen from the closure at the same time of both Station Walk and the north-south route. Like you, I welcome the fact that these representations have been taken on board and that one or the other of these routes will be kept open once the necessary safety measures are implemented to ensure that the north-south route can be re-opened. Your feedback from the Residents' Forum would have explained why Station Walk has to be closed for a much longer period of time than anticipated. I acknowledge your concern about fire, health and safety matters and I am sure you will agree that neither of these routes should be opened while they would be hazardous to local people.

5. I do not believe that you are in a position to comment on the way the ward councillors - but again particularly me - have been treated by one of your members at our surgeries. The fact that he has not attended for a couple of months does not erase his poor behaviour in the past.

6. I copied my response to Cllr. Coleridge in the interests of transparency - and I believe it demonstrates the level of stress that I have experienced. I do feel that I have been subjected personally to abuse and bullying over a long period of time and you do not have the right to assert the contrary on my behalf. Indeed, many people have expressed surprise that I have been so patient for so long. Just because one person does not believe that he behaves in an unacceptable manner does not mean that the recipient of that behaviour finds it acceptable. My ward colleagues will concur with this.

7. Incidentally, my colleagues and I have on a number of occasions advised your Group's representative that personal comments he has made to us about Council officers and e-mails that he has sent to them are completely unacceptable. We have

continually stressed that Council officers do not make decisions; they act upon decisions taken by councillors to the best of their ability and should not be subjected to unwarranted criticism or attack for doing their job.

8. I note your statement that I occupy a position of considerable power within the Hornton Street establishment. If only I did!

9. Finally, the ward councillors – and indeed many others – find it very irritating that your Group claims to speak on behalf of “the community”. We know that you speak on behalf of a small group of people. You do not speak on behalf of the wider community and you have never been able to demonstrate any legitimacy for this claim.

As stated before, your ward councillors remain more than willing to raise any legitimate complaints, issues and concerns that are bound to arise during the two years of construction works – and no doubt other matters that may emerge once the new development is up and running.

I do not intend to engage any further in this particular exchange of correspondence.

Kind regards

Cllr. Judith Blakeman

From: Francis O'Connor [mailto: [REDACTED]]
Sent: 20 February 2013 02:54
To: Cllr-Blakeman
Cc: Teresa Miles; Eddie Daffarn; Steve Cunningham; Rumble, Siobhan: RBKCTMO Ltd; Robert Black; Chiefex; Johnson, Laura: HS-Housing; Wray, Janice: RBKCTMO Ltd; Cllr-Coleridge; Cllr-Atkinson (R); Cllr-Foreman; Colin Chiles; LizJeffer@Leadbitter.co.uk; Cllr-Dent Coad
Subject: Re: Fire safety etc

Dear Judith,

We are grateful for your response on the fire safety issue and hope to be kept updated on how this develops.

However, I personally take great exception to the tone and content of the rest of your email, in which you appear to accuse me, and other members of the Grenfell Action Group, of making complaints “*couched in tendentious, abusive, offensive and bullying terms*”.

You also accuse us of making “*vexatious complaints that are intended solely to delay the completion of the construction works*”.

If you have evidence to support either of these accusations kindly produce it without further delay. Otherwise I must ask that you desist from making such false and scurrilous accusations, which I note that you have copied widely in an apparent attempt to damage our reputation and undermine the legitimacy of the concerns and complaints we have quite properly raised, and will continue to raise.

The position taken by the Labour Group, and by Notting Barns ward councillors in particular, in supporting the RBKC decision to impose the hated KALC development on this totally unsuitable site was disgraceful and completely indefensible. The situation that now prevails is that the residents Grenfell Tower have been deprived, and will remain deprived for the duration of the

works, of all residential amenity space, including the small playground for pre-teens that used to stand next to Grenfell Tower, and which is now completely destroyed.

Where will the children of the Grenfell area play? Where will the toddlers of the area play? How can the elderly and infirm venture outside to take the air or to sit in quiet contemplation? There was a time when Labour Party councillors could be counted on to defend the rights of the poor and powerless. This is clearly no longer the case, at least not in Notting Barns, hence the formation of uncompromising action groups such as ours.

I presume that your accusation of *"vexatious complaints intended solely to delay completion of the construction works"* refers to our recent efforts to resist the Council's **illegal** closure of the rights-of-way through the area now occupied by the KALC site. According to feedback I received from yesterday's Community Forum, Leadbitters and the Council have now acknowledged the hardship these closures cause to local residents, particularly the most vulnerable, and have agreed to re-open a north/south right of way through the centre of the KALC site.

The complaints against the closures, championed by our Mr Daffarn, and to which you appear to have taken particular and very personal exception, have clearly been entirely vindicated, although the apology Mr Daffarn was seeking, on behalf of the community, has yet to materialise. If you had an ounce of integrity you too would be demanding that apology.

Your use of the terms *"abusive, offensive and bullying"* was also extended to an accusation that our members had behaved in such a manner at ward councillor's surgeries. This accusation appears also to be directed specifically against Mr Daffarn, who assures me that he hasn't actually attended one of your surgeries for several months, and certainly did not behave in an abusive or bullying manner when he did.

One has to wonder why, if Mr Daffarn's behaviour was so troubling, you waited five whole months before complaining to me about it. One has to wonder also why you would direct this complaint to me at all. I am not Mr Daffarn's keeper. If you have a problem with him I suggest you sort it out with him. I know that I have never found his behaviour abusive, offensive or bullying, and I do not recognise your characterisation of him - or perhaps I might more correctly call it your character assassination of him, because I am quite sure that this is your true intention - both yours and that of Cllr Coleridge who has already insulted, falsely accused and tried to provoke Mr Daffarn in an earlier email (to which you also refer)

Incidentally, your reaction to Cllr Coleridge's attack on Mr Daffarn:

"Tim, Fantastic – thank you SOOO much, Judith"

strikes me as a particularly disgusting, odious and completely inappropriate attempt to humiliate and provoke Mr Daffarn beyond endurance.

Cllr Coleridge and yourself both occupy positions of considerable power within the Hornton Street establishment, yet you abuse your power to intimidate and threaten him, and then have to effrontery, like Goliath confronting David, to call him the bully. There is something especially odious about the way that you have conspired together to attack the character and reputation of this local man who has done no more than dare to challenge your abuse of power and unprincipled betrayal of the Lancaster West community, and to fight to defend local residents against the juggernaut of this rotten and unprincipled Tory Council.

Yours most sincerely,

Francis O'Connor

----- Original Message -----

From: Cllr.Blakeman@rbkc.gov.uk

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]; steven.cunningham@london-fire.gov.uk; srumble@kctmo.org.uk; rblack@kctmo.org.uk; Chiefex@rbkc.gov.uk; Laura.Johnson@rbkc.gov.uk; jwray@kctmo.org.uk; Cllr.Coleridge@rbkc.gov.uk; CllrR.Atkinson@rbkc.gov.uk; Cllr.Foreman@rbkc.gov.uk; ColinChiles@Leadbitter.co.uk; LizJefferies@Leadbitter.co.uk

Sent: Monday, February 18, 2013 12:01 PM

Subject: RE: Fire safety at Lancaster West

Dear Francis

Thank you for this, it is very useful. I have asked for a full and comprehensive report once the emergency fire test at Grenfell Tower has been conducted and also for this to be an item on the Lancaster West EMB meeting agenda. I have also asked for the likely timeframe within which we can expect a response.

Just for your information, I would like to reiterate that the ward councillors are more than willing to address any legitimate concerns and complaints that residents raise with regard to the KALC project and the Grenfell Tower and Verity Close improvement works. What we are no longer prepared to address are complaints that are couched in tendentious, abusive, offensive or bullying terms. Neither will we tolerate visits to our surgery that are conducted in a similar fashion. I believe that Cllr. Coleridge has given out much the same message.

We will also not deal with vexatious complaints that are intended solely to delay the completion of the construction works. We have received and continue to receive a significant amount of feedback from local residents and their most earnest wish is for the project to be completed on time and ideally before time. Most residents do not have the opportunity to leave the area for extended holidays to get away from the disruption.

Kind regards.

Judith

From: Francis O'Connor [mailto:[REDACTED]]

Sent: 18 February 2013 01:24

To: Cllr-Blakeman

Cc: Teresa Miles; Eddie Daffarn; Steve Cunningham; Rumble, Siobhan: RBKCTMO Ltd; Robert Black; Chiefex; Johnson, Laura: HS-Housing; Wray, Janice: RBKCTMO Ltd; Cllr-Coleridge

Subject: Fw: Fire safety at Lancaster West

Dear Judith,

We are grateful for your recent interventions on the Verity Close windows issue, and no less, on the Grenfell Tower fire safety issue, where your intervention appears to have had immediate effect. However, while we welcome the proposed fire safety exercise by LFB at Grenfell Tower we still have doubts that this will fully address the issues at this site.

Please see below our recent correspondence with Steve Cunningham at LFB. I have to say that we found his response disappointing, in particular his advice that we call the police next time we see vehicles parked illegally in the Grenfell Tower area. This strikes me as more of a fob-off than a genuine response to the issues we raised with regard to repeated obstructions of the emergency access zone by TMO and other service vehicles with the complicity of Lancaster West staff.

We have other concerns, and other evidence, which we have not yet aired. Please see the attached Grenfell Tower Fire Risk Assessment from November 2012, which was supplied to us by Janice Wray some weeks ago. Most of the content is, of course, fairly routine until you get to Page 28 where the following is recorded:

"From the asset records provided to me by the TMO the emergency lighting and fire alarm systems along with the dry riser, fire fighter lifts and the hose reels installed in this building are all subject to a maintenance contracts. Testing, servicing and maintenance is being carried out by professional third party contractors on a planned preventive maintenance programme with records kept centrally by TMO at the "Hub" and by the contractor for all these systems, no test certificates have been seen to confirm this.

RGE Services are under contract to TMO to provide portable fire fighting equipment, testing, servicing and maintenance, the fire extinguisher in this building, the basement boiler room, the lift motor room, the ground floor electrical room plus other areas were out of test date according to the contractors label on the extinguishers. The last test date was on the 8th August 2011. Some located in the roof level areas had "condemned" written on them in large black writing with a last test date of 2009 or 2010. This seems to indicate that monthly occupier inspections are not being carried out.

It is not known if the caretaker is undertaking the monthly occupier's tests of the installed emergency lighting system, fire extinguishers and structural items as per the caretakers check list this would include the external stairs and lift checks with the results being kept as a record of testing having been undertaken."

On the face of it this is alarming evidence of serious ongoing negligence, rendered all the more alarming when considered as part of a history of negligence that in all likelihood stretches back to 2004 and beyond.

I chaired the EMB Property Management Committee in 2004 when we received information that the Grenfell Tower emergency lighting system was in very poor condition, two thirds of the battery backs being dead, and the entire system would have failed in an emergency. We then fought a protracted battle with the TMO for more than a year, during which time they repeatedly denied that there was a problem, or any negligence with regard to inspection and testing of the system. Eventually we badgered them into ordering an independent investigation. This was conducted by Peter West of Capita Symonds. His report, when it was published in May 2005, was a shocking indictment of TMO administration and oversight, and of the electrical contractors whose duty it was to inspect and test the Lancaster West emergency lighting equipment.

The report recommended that all batteries be replaced urgently, and this was done immediately. However, other recommendations appear to have been largely ignored, one of which was that the TMO urgently consider options for replacing the whole system, which was virtually obsolete and unfit for purpose. Another crucial recommendation that appears to have been ignored was that the TMO initiate and enforce in future a far more rigorous testing and inspection regime for fire safety equipment at Lancaster West. The implications of the Capita Symonds report went way beyond Lancaster West and led to a wide ranging review of TMO fire safety procedures throughout the borough. Unfortunately, the lessons of 2004/2005 appear to have soon been forgotten and the culture of negligence at the TMO with regard to fire safety at Lancaster West appears to have reverted to type and to have continued unabated to the present. Please see attached extract from the Capita Symonds report. Unfortunately I no longer have a copy of the full report, but it should still be on file at TMO

We were intending to simply expose these failings on our blog, rather than waste our time and effort, as we had previously, in non-productive email exchanges with Ms Rumble and Ms Wray, who appear, as far as we can judge, not even to have read the current assessment. However having witnessed more than once your willingness to act on the Grenfell Tower fire safety issue, and the speedier responses your interventions tend to elicit, we have decided to copy this material to you first, in the hope that you can elicit the necessary urgent responses from the responsible authorities.

Incidentally, I note from the account of the recent Trellick Tower exercise that four fire appliances attended on that occasion. We would be very interested to see whether LFB can fit four appliances into the Grenfell Tower emergency access zone, particularly if it is obstructed with multiple parked service vehicles, as it often is during working hours. Given that Lancaster West management and LFB have both dismissed our concerns about such obstructions of the emergency access to Grenfell Tower, we would even dare to suggest that arrangements are made to ensure that a minimum of six service vehicles are intentionally parked in this area, for the duration of the exercise, including three in the gallows-gated area, to test ease of access and manoeuvrability of fire appliances under such circumstances.

Yours sincerely,

Francis O'Connor

----- Original Message -----

From: STEVEN.CUNNINGHAM@london-fire.gov.uk

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: JANE.PHILPOTT2@london-fire.gov.uk ; nicolas.comery@london-fire.gov.uk

Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2013 1:17 PM

Subject: RE: Fire safety at Lancaster West

Dear Mr O'Connor,

Thank you for your emails of your latest posts. I have looked at the photograph you have sent and have asked my Station to pay a visit today to make their own assessment on what they find and to relay this to me. I do hope we can work together, with the TMO as well, to ensure the access to Grenfell Tower is always available to us in an emergency. If at any time the access is blocked by illegally parked or inappropriately parked vehicles then I would advise that you should contact the Police to have the vehicles removed.

I look forward to meeting at some time convenient to yourself to discuss your concerns further. Regarding the likely disruption around the works to be carried out at Grenfell Tower I will speak to my colleague in the Regulatory Fire Safety Team and also the TMO in developing a suitable way forward when the works start.

If I can be of any help in the mean time please feel free to contact me.

Best Regards

Steven Cunningham

Station Manager G27

North Kensington

[REDACTED] p13021/ [REDACTED]

From: Francis O'Connor [[mailto:\[REDACTED\]](mailto:[REDACTED])]

Sent: 31 January 2013 00:15

To: CUNNINGHAM, STEVEN

Subject: Fire safety at Lancaster West

Dear Mr Cunningham,

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday afternoon I am writing now just to begin what I hope will be a fruitful dialogue with you on the subject of fire safety in the Grenfell Tower area. Please find the attached photo which was taken on 23rd January and shows two vehicles parked on the tight corner on the final approach to Grenfell Tower, which we discussed in our telephone conversation. The small blue van belongs to the Estate Management Board, and the larger bulk refuse truck behind it belongs to the cleaning contractors OCS. In our opinion both of these vehicles are likely to obstruct a fire appliance responding to an emergency in the Grenfell Tower area.

Later tonight I will send you a further two emails, which are reproductions of the two most recent posts on our website;

<http://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com>

These webpages reproduce the text and accompanying pictures of the web content in question, which I hope will provide you with enough background information and photographic evidence to understand why we are pursuing this issue so vigorously, and some of the difficulties we have had dealing with the authorities at Lancaster West. We tried to deal with this issue by exchanging emails with Ms Rumble at LW, and MS Wray at TMO, and only resorted to the nuclear option (ie embarrassing them publicly via our blog) when we had tried repeatedly but failed to resolve this issue by more conventional (and more confidential) means.

Our campaign will continue until we are satisfied that these issues have been dealt with responsibly.

I told you on the phone that we also have a copy of the most recent (November 2012) Fire Risk Assessment for Grenfell Tower and that some of the detail of this is disturbing also. With your permission I intend to copy this document to you and inform you of our concerns regarding some of the failings identified in this report.

In closing, I would like to repeat the assurance I offered you on the phone that we will not quote on our website from any response you make to us, as you have made it very clear that you are not allowed to make public statements on behalf of the LFB. Please rest assured that we will respect your wishes in this regard.

Yours Sincerely,

Francis O'Connor
Grenfell Action Group

For fire safety advice please go to <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/YourSafety.asp>

EMAIL DISCLAIMER: The Information in the email may contain confidential or privileged materials. Please read the full email disclaimer notice at <http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/EmailDisclaimer.asp>.

No virus found in this incoming message.

Checked by AVG - www.avg.com

Version: 9.0.932 / Virus Database: 2639.1.1/5568 - Release Date: 01/30/13 07:37:00

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

This e-mail may contain information which is confidential, legally privileged and/or copyright protected. This e-mail is intended for the addressee only. If you receive this in error, please contact the sender and delete the material from your computer.

No virus found in this incoming message.

Checked by AVG - www.avg.com

Version: 9.0.932 / Virus Database: 2639.1.1/5613 - Release Date: 02/18/13 07:34:00

in

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
This e-mail may contain information which is confidential,
legally privileged and/or copyright protected. This e-mail
is intended for the addressee only. If you receive this in
error, please contact the sender and delete the material
from your computer.
