
PHASE 2 – MODULE 1

OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF

THE LONDON FIRE COMMISSIONER

1. As module 1 of phase 2 of the inquiry gets under way the LFB remains focused on delivering all necessary positive changes to operational procedures and training which reflect the lessons learned from the tragic events of 14th June 2017.
2. The issues and evidence which are to be examined in module 1 (and the modules which immediately follow it) are of crucial importance to the LFB in its learning process so that positive changes may be fully informed by a clear understanding of how the condition of Grenfell Tower facilitated the development of the fire.
3. With that in mind the Brigade reminds the Inquiry of its Opening and Closing Statements for Phase 1 in so far as they touched upon the fire safety requirements of the building regulations which require that residential high rise buildings should be designed, built and maintained to support the “stay put” principle.
4. As certain of the Inquiry’s experts have pointed out, “stay put” is **not** principle or policy which was invented by fire and rescue services. It is a principle of building design and construction.

5. As Dr Lane stated:

‘The fire protection measures must be constructed and then maintained to ensure they are fit for purpose in the event of fire. The stay-put strategy is provided through design construction and ongoing maintenance. All building occupants, including the Fire Brigade, rely on it in the event of a fire. It is the single safety condition provided

for in the design of high-rise residential buildings in England. The statutory guidance makes no provision within the building for anything other than a stay-put strategy. There is no means of warning nor a means to communicate the need to increase the areas to be evacuated as is currently regulated for other building uses.'

18th Jun 18/pp39-40

6. In those circumstances the LFB strongly maintains that the public and emergency services should be entitled to have faith in the efficacy of such a fundamental safety requirement for buildings of this kind.
7. Phase 1 of the Inquiry was a robust and thorough examination of the operational response to the fire by the fire service and its partner services. The LFB trusts that the Inquiry and its experts will apply the same meticulous scrutiny to the questions how and why Grenfell Tower came to fall so far short of these basic regulatory requirements that it was the scene of the worst and most devastating fire in residential premises since the second world war.
8. A full understanding of how and why the fire took hold and developed with such rapidity and to such an extent is also of paramount significance to fire and rescue services nationally if the advancement of policy and training is to be achieved to maximum effect in the interest of public safety and that of fire fighters who must be deployed into such buildings to carry out fire and rescue duties.
9. As part of that scrutiny the Brigade is strongly of the view that a detailed smoke, heat and fire modelling project will provide essential information from which fire and rescue services can plan effectively for similar incidents in the future.
10. A vitally important element of the learning which will be facilitated by such a modelling exercise is the potential impact which the manner in which fire, smoke and heat behaved at the Grenfell Tower fire had on the viability of the rescue and evacuation of residents at different times of the night. Important information of that kind may be extrapolated to predict the behaviour of fire and smoke in any future incidents of a

similar kind and be used by fire and rescue services to assist in the continuous review of policies and procedures.

- 11.** This is of particular importance given the statutory obligations which fire and rescue services have to the safety of fire fighters who are deployed into buildings in a fire situation – particularly buildings which are fundamentally unsafe by reason of the failure of multiple levels of fire safety measures which they are designed to provide.
- 12.** The Brigade is appreciative of the fact that the Phase 1 Report recognises the bravery and selflessness of fire fighters who were deployed into Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, in some cases without firefighting equipment, which created a very significant risk to their safety.
- 13.** Fire and rescue services must obviously assess and reduce as far as reasonably practicable the risks to both fire fighters and members of the public through the development of training and policy. This is one of the key reasons why the detailed analysis of the range of issues to be addressed in phase 2 is of such crucial significance.
- 14.** While these opening submissions must be confined to the matters under consideration in module 1, it is important for the moment to emphasise the tireless work which the LFB has undertaken to ensure that Londoners are kept safe in the event of fire.
- 15.** That wide ranging work, which commenced immediately after the Grenfell Tower fire, has been well documented both in statements to this Inquiry and in publicly available material provided to stakeholders such as the Greater London Authority. Close liaison with central government has also been at the heart of the LFB's programme and there can be no doubt that a substantial investment has been made both in terms of finance, time and fire service personnel to ensure that learning from the Grenfell Tower fire is progressed with expedition.
- 16.** Not least of the LFB's priorities is the urgent work to address the recommendations made in the Inquiry's Phase 1 Report which are acknowledged and welcomed by the Brigade.

- 17.** The Phase 1 Report represented a thorough and detailed analysis of the vast amount of evidence adduced during phase 1. Much of that evidence was derived from the LFB itself, not only in the evidence provided by brigade staff at the live hearings but also in the painstaking Operational Response Reports which were compiled by the LFB over many months beginning immediately after the fire.
- 18.** The Brigade hopes that it has provided real and meaningful assistance to the Inquiry, both through the preparation of those reports and by facilitating the complex process of ensuring the attendance at the Inquiry of over 80 fire fighters and other Brigade staff who gave oral evidence, drawn from written statements made by many hundreds of fire fighters who attended on the night.
- 19.** The matters to be addressed in module 1 represent the beginning of the process of learning how it was that a building which was designed and built to keep residents safe appears to have promoted the development of a devastating fire with such catastrophic consequences
- 20.** The Brigade has listened very hard to the findings of the Phase 1 Report and is committed to working with the Grenfell community to do everything it can to prevent such a tragedy ever happening again. It will continue to assist the Inquiry in the coming months.
- 21.** Finally, the LFB and all of those who work within it will never forget the appalling impact which the night of 14th June 2017 had, and continues to have, on the bereaved, survivors and residents of Grenfell Tower and the surrounding area. The Brigade commends the Inquiry for ensuring that they have been and will continue to be central to the Inquiry process to ensure that meaningful lessons will be learned and acted upon.

Stephen Walsh Q.C.

Sarah Le Fevre

20th December 2019