

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: GILL, AMANDA

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: HEAD OF HOUSING NEEDS

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This statement (consisting of 4 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: A GILL

Date: 26/07/2018

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

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I am currently employed as The Head of Housing Needs at The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (R.B.K.C). The purpose of this statement is to explain my role and responsibilities within the housing department of R.B.K.C and to provide information regarding my knowledge of and involvement in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower which I will state at the outset was minimal.

My direct line manager at RBKC is The Director of Housing, who reports to the Chief Executive. At the time of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017, my line manager was

Laura JOHNSON. Laura has subsequently left this role and my current line manager is Maxine HOLDSWORTH, who is on secondment from Islington Council.

I have been employed by R.B.K.C since July 1998 and have held my current post for around 8 years. My predecessor was Martin WADDINGTON who left on secondment and I believe is now employed by another council. I have had a number of roles within R.B.K.C since my initial employment, starting as a mental health resettlement officer, then young person's housing advisor, housing options manager until promotion to my current role

As the Head of Housing Needs I manage the operational function of the housing department. My teams provide housing advice and support and manage all of the borough's allocation of permanent and temporary social housing. Allocation of housing within the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (K.C.T.M.O) stock was previously managed by K.C.T.M.O but this role was re-absorbed by my department roughly 6 years ago. K.C.T.M.O staff who had this responsibility were re-employed by R.B.K.C directly.

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Residency within K.C.T.M.O buildings once allocated by my department is then managed by K.C.T.M.O with regards to setting up tenancy agreements, the collection of rent and any issues regarding those properties.

I directly manage six separate teams and I am the line manager of the heads of each of these teams. The teams are as follows:

Homelessness Team -manager Veneeze AUGUSTINE.

This team of approximately 20 staff are customer facing and work under housing legislation. If an individual approaches the council and presents as homeless they are given an initial assessment to determine whether they are in priority need and are eligible for housing. They are then allocated to a housing advisor within the team who will manage their needs and the council's statutory responsibilities to them. If an individual is vulnerable or has children they are placed in temporary accommodation managed by the Temporary Accommodation Team.

Temporary Accommodation - manager Rachel DOULTON

There are 1900 R.B.K.C households in temporary accommodation across and outside London, with the majority located geographically in East London. These individuals and families are managed by the Temporary Accommodation Team. There are approximately 20 staff within this section. The team are responsible for identifying an individual or families specific physical and geographical needs and establishing what type of temporary accommodation would be suitable. They establish if people need to remain in or near to the borough due to health or family needs or whether they can be provided with housing within or outside Greater London. They will place families within self-contained accommodation if possible. Single people will generally go into bed and breakfast. The team arrange and manage any placements and arrange income recovery from housing benefits. They generally work with agents who facilitate the actual provision of accommodation and are paid a management fee. When people within temporary housing are subsequently allocated social housing this will generally be back within the borough and will be managed by The Housing Options and Allocations Team.

Housing Options and Allocation Team -manager Altin SMAJLI

This team of around 15 staff provide housing allocation and advice to people who are residents within R.B.K.C, or in temporary accommodation and who need or who want to move for reasons such as overcrowding, medical needs, domestic violence or other issues. The team manage the housing register which allows allocation of available social housing belonging to K.C.T.M.O as well as some housing association and trust properties. Allocation is based on a priority points system. The team determine what

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accommodation is suitable for those in need and will offer housing to those individuals according to priority. Those not resident within R.B.K.C, who are not homeless, will not be allocated housing but will be referred back to their home borough for support.

Also within this team are an independent review section of 4 staff who consider complaints and challenges to homelessness or housing allocation team's decisions.

**Social Inclusion Team -manager Huw WILLIAMS**

This team deal predominantly with the "street population," working with rough sleepers. There is an outreach team including social workers, a drug and alcohol support worker and a community psychiatric nurse. The team will go out in shifts, including at night. They will interact with rough sleepers and can refer those they are particularly concerned about, for example those with mental health issues for assessment by the social workers. There is a police officer attached to the team who will also go out with them. The aim of this team is to get homeless off the streets and into supported accommodation and hostels. The team will work with people who are in such accommodation to help them to retain their tenancies and encourage them to engage with support services.

Six members of this team are employed directly by R.B.K.C with other members of the outreach team employed by St Mungo's and the police officer is on attachment to the team.

**Private Rented Sector -co-ordinator John HUTCHINS**

John HUTCHINS works with landlords and prospective tenants to assist people to undertake private rentals of available privately owned property. This provides people with an element of choice in obtaining housing, albeit limited by London affordability issues. This is a small element of the overall department and is fulfilled by John HUTCHINS alone.

**I.T/Performance -manager Arvind THANDI**

A team of four staff who maintain our own I.T systems which are used to manage and advertise social housing vacancies, allocations and residencies. They also maintain systems for recording reporting requirements and performance indicators such as numbers of identified homeless people and numbers in temporary accommodation.

I undertake fortnightly management meetings with all the heads of these teams and hold regular one to ones with each of them. Quarterly, there is a wider meeting with my direct reports and each of their team leaders. I meet with my line manager, The Director of Housing, fortnightly at senior management meetings. I would also have one to ones with the previous Director of Housing, Laura JOHNSON.

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In regards to Grenfell Tower specifically, none of my team members would have had direct involvement in the regeneration work on this building. I had no management responsibility or knowledge of either the financial, planning or construction elements of this project or of the re-design of the building or materials used. I have no personal knowledge of any building works undertaken at Grenfell Tower. I had never been to the building prior to the fire.

My department would have had an ongoing responsibility via The Housing Options and Allocations Team for the allocation of housing within Grenfell Tower, including that of those new accommodation units which were created during the regeneration of the building. I have no specific knowledge of the actual allocation of any individual tenancies within Grenfell Tower by my team, but is likely that this would have happened. If there were any complaints by tenants regarding their placement within Grenfell Tower this would have been the remit of my teams, but this would only encompass suitability of the type of property and its location and not with regards to the building itself. Complaints regarding the building's fabric or infrastructure would be dealt with directly by the landlord (K.C.T.M.O.) My department would not be involved in or made aware of any complaints or concerns regarding general health and safety or specific fire safety at either Grenfell Tower or any other K.C.T.M.O properties. Any information, for example fire safety or evacuation advice provided to tenants at Grenfell Tower or other K.C.T.M.O properties would be given directly by the landlord and not via my department.

Whilst my department is responsible for allocating accommodation according to housing needs, we are not directly involved in any council or K.C.T.M.O planning processes which build, procure or adapt accommodation specific to those needs. We will submit reports which identify current requirements, for example how many people we have on the housing register who require two bedroom flats or wheel-chair access. This information is quite broad-focused and I would generally anticipate a five year lead time before any new units were actually delivered. This is our only input to the planning process. We are not directly consulted with regards to individual projects and were not consulted regarding Grenfell Tower specifically. The only exception to this general rule would relate to units under development specifically for people with mobility issues. Under these circumstances our occupational therapist who sits within The Housing Options Team may be consulted at the planning stage but I do not believe that this was the case with Grenfell Tower. Under ordinary circumstances I would simply share general information regarding current and anticipated trends in housing via Laura JOHNSON, Director of Housing, Amanda JOHNSON, The Head of Housing Commissioning and Martin MIAH, The Head of Regeneration. It is possible that the regeneration of Grenfell Tower was discussed at senior management meetings at which I

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was present but I did not take an active part in any such discussion and have no recollections of the substance of any such conversations if they did take place.

I had not had any interaction with any residents groups representing Grenfell Tower prior to the fire. I have a limited recollection of the existence of a blog, called perhaps The Grenfell Action Group which I think a colleague may have mentioned in passing, or was possibly discussed in management. My knowledge of this is very limited but I believe it related to a residents group complaining. This is not unusual in social housing and did not fall under my team's area of responsibility. I have more knowledge of this blog and who was involved in producing it now, after the fire, but this was not something that had attracted my specific attention at the time I first became vaguely aware of it at some point prior to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

I also have some recollection of a newsletter which I received spam e-mail links to on my work computer. This complained about the T.M.O generally, but to my recollection not specifically with regards to Grenfell Tower. I would estimate that this was not within the last 5 years.

On the day of the fire at Grenfell Tower, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017, I attended the area and the emergency reception centres with members of my team. I was involved in overseeing R.B.K.C's immediate attempts to find temporary hotel accommodation for those residents displaced by the fire. The responsibility to provide temporary accommodation and ultimately re-house these residents is ongoing for my department. At this time 48 residents have been permanently re-housed, 56 are in self-contained temporary accommodation and 108 remain in hotels. In relation to that day I would say that the circumstances were chaotic and the general mood of residents reflected a dislike for R.B.K.C. I did not remember seeing or hear anything on that day which I believe to have provided me with any pertinent personal information or knowledge regarding the fire at Grenfell Tower. My role was a practical one in line with my professional responsibility of seeking to find accommodation for those affected and it was on this task that I concentrated.

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