

GRENFELL TOWER COMPACT MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2015

The meeting was arranged for residents to meet with MP Victoria Borwick (VB), Cllr Judith Blakeman (JB) and Peter Maddison (PM) and Sacha Jevans (SJ) from the TMO.

Residents reiterated that at the July meeting with MP Victoria Borwick it was agreed that they could opt for either a hallway or kitchen location for the HIU, the kitchen option having previously been refused. PM stated that the HIU would have to be in the hallway unless the works had not commenced, in which case either option was available. At the end of the refurbishment programme residents could ask for the HIU to be moved and the financial and practical implications of the moves would be considered. JB asked for all the relevant financial information to be made available if it was decided that this would preclude units being moved.

David Collins (DC) for the Compact said that the survey the Compact was conducting of residents showed that a lot of work remained to be done and a number of matters had not been progressed well. PM said that only 3 or 4 households had not yet been connected to the heating system because of access issues. It would all be complete by Christmas so long as entry to the flats was obtained. There would then be follow up visits to ensure everyone was familiar with how the new system works.

Steve Power (SP) said that he had been left without heating for five days.

VB asked the TMO to blitz the outstanding work so that everyone would have heating by Christmas.

DC reported on the Compact survey. Residents were still complaining that they felt harassed and threatened. The Compact had contacted 58 households so far. Although residents now felt more positively about Rydon, the threats from the TMO to take them to court, leave them without water, involve the police to force entry into their homes, the possible loss of their tenancy, were still ongoing. PM said that all specific reports about issues would be investigated.

SP passed a letter from Rydon to VB, who said it was unsatisfactory. PM undertook to discuss that issue with SP outside the meeting.

Reference was made to complaints from Flats nos. 145 and 126 that had not been addressed.

VB asked the TMO proactively to visit every flat to ensure that heating and hot water were available; then other outstanding issues should be addressed.

DC asked that an independent person be brought in to investigate the outstanding issues and complaints. VB suggested that JB could do this but JB pointed out that she had already tried and failed to get a number of matters resolved. It was important that it should be looked at by an outside person independent of the Council.

SJ said that the TMO would door knock every flat in the coming week. VB asked that all complaints should be recorded at these visits so that there was no need for residents to go through the complaints procedure, which was both time consuming and tedious.

Fahed Barakat (FB) pointed out that he had used the complaints procedure to ask for the HIU to be located in his kitchen and not the hallway. The TMO had refused, since a small amount of work had commenced back in April. He had been told he had to use the complaints procedure, otherwise the matter would not be addressed. However, he had not been advised that he could move his complaint up to Stage Two, and once he had referred it to Stage Two he had been threatened with court proceedings, ie. before the complaints procedure had been exhausted.

VB was surprised that the TMO was relying on the complaints procedure. She felt that going through the Compact would have been a more positive way of dealing with problems.

PM said that the TMO had a legal responsibility to provide heating and hot water; where the TMO could not agree with the resident, this necessitated the use of court letters. The TMO had taken legal advice and had been told that it would have to get court orders. The Rydon contract had an end date, so legal action had become a necessity.

FB was concerned that he had not been able to exhaust the complaints procedure but had been left without heating for over four weeks.

DC said the Compact wished to raise four issues:

1. The need for an independent investigation of what had gone wrong, including the effectiveness or otherwise of the complaints procedure
2. The location and/or relocation of the HIUs
3. The state of the building and making everything good at the end of the process, for example, there is no plan to improve the stairwells although they are in a disgraceful state and possibly dangerous in places
4. Compensation for residents who had spent their own money and that the need to produce receipts to justify the compensation had not been communicated to anybody.

PM said the cost of an independent investigation would have to come out of the overall contract price. Residents said it should not come from the Grenfell project because the learning process would inform projects on other tower blocks that are in the pipeline for refurbishment. Residents also said that the clear issues of a lack of trust everywhere and fear of the TMO needed to be investigated independently.

There was then a lengthy discussion of a range of concerns expressed by those residents present relating to solicitors' letters being received while discussions for entry arrangements were still proceeding, heating systems not set correctly even after three visits, erratic heating systems (one radiator going full blast and the two others not working), appointments being made and then not being kept by the operatives, windows not being installed correctly, - flats 205, 174, 122 and (Aziza) were cited during these discussion. No. [REDACTED] was also cited where the resident is

disabled and this had not been taken into account.

PM confirmed that none of the works had been signed off as being satisfactory. The TMO Clerk of Works would check the works again, and there would be a further survey once all the works were completed.

Residents also complained about "buck passing" between Rydon and the TMO. PMN said that at the end of the day it is up to the TMO to resolve issues, but residents said that having been to both organisations, they did not know where else to turn.

JB mentioned the hallway HIUs in one-bedroomed flats that were not flush with the ledge but sticking out into the hallway. These were a safety hazard, especially for small children and also meant furniture could not be brought in and out. PM said he would investigate this concern.

One resident said that a visitor in a wheelchair had been unable to get into his flat because of the hallway location of the HIU. This was also his only exit in the event of a fire, but exit would be impeded. It was just plain silly to put the HIU there when there was ample room in the kitchen.

Flat 75 was cited where the resident had made numerous calls to Claire Williams, who was dealing with repairs, but calls were not being returned and outstanding damage had not been made good.

Flats 85 and 75 both said that they had bad smells in the sitting room and lavatory; 85 said calls were not being returned. An appointment had been made between 10 am and 2 pm one day, he had stayed home but no one came and no one had the courtesy to advise that the operative could not attend. He had made reports twice a week but no repairs were carried out; then someone came, took a photograph of the damage, that was two weeks ago but nothing has been heard since.

Customer Service at the TMO is not communicating with residents either. SJ said that these matters were specific to Grenfell Tower, so Customer Service should not become involved.

No 85 lost his TV for five days; No. 75 wanted an assurance that the smells would be gone by Christmas. Both householders complained about buck passing between Rydon and the TMO.

A general complaint was that TV aerials were not turned back on when works were completed. Flat 205 said that the ventilation in the lavatory was not turned back on. When it was done, it was too noisy and this went on for four months. There was also noise coming from the roof during the night and ruining her sleep. She had complained to Rydon, who said it was the fans on the roof. She is not able to sleep as a result. The neighbour at 203 has the same problem. PM said that the problems with the roof gulley would be resolved.

Flat 206 had not had hot water for three months.

Flat 92, FB's issues, he felt he was being harassed over the location of the HIU; he

had not included harassment in his formal complaint but asked for it to be formally logged as harassment now. FB objected that having been first offered the option of the kitchen or the hallway, then the decision had been taken only to offer the hallway but there had been no consultation with residents about this change. Two-way communication between the TMO and the residents did not work.

SJ said that the TMO had had to revise the project works once the builders got on site. JB said this was one clear reason why residents had no trust in the TMO. FB also mentioned the pipe above his fuse box and whether this was safe, and that he cannot pivot furniture into the flat via the hallway now.

Compact members asked how the TMO could ensure that it was able to complete a 100% survey of all residents. Not everyone was at home during working hours. Would TMO representatives come at weekends? PM said he could not commit to weekend surveying but the TMO would drop a card where they had not made contact with the residents.

Other issues raised were "cracking noises" right next door to a resident's bedroom; units being imposed in the hallway while the resident was still going through the complaints procedure – thus making a mockery of the complaints procedure that the TMO itself had insisted be used; the double cost of installing the HIU in the hallway and then moving it to the kitchen when it could have been done just once in the kitchen; one resident being told that works would take one day but finding that it took from 8 am to 6.30 pm on one day and then a further four hours the following day; problems about taking time off work and work not being finished in time; one resident with disabilities who needs all day heating, but the new system is not hot enough and she fears that she will not be able to meet the extra cost of the individual bill (flat [REDACTED]).

PM said that FB's system had been disconnected, which was why the HIU had to go in the hallway. FB said that although he was disconnected in April, no works had been done until September, when he could have had the kitchen option. He had spoken to Linda (Rydon) and to Claire (TMO) at the time when this had been possible, to no avail. He had then complied with allowing access, when others were still refusing, and had thus lost the option of the kitchen installation. He was just asking for a firm commitment that his HIU will be moved into the kitchen. PM said he could not have a firm commitment as this would set a precedent and reiterated that all cases would be examined at the end of the project in the context of the financial situation.

FB referred to broken tiles, a large hole being drilled into the wall, just covered by extra large boxing in to conceal the damage, and blinds and curtains not being replaced. PM said that the TMO would contact FB about his blinds and curtains. FB pointed to the lack of consistency. Some residents had had their blinds and curtains fitted back properly, others had not.

Flat 205 said that there was now not enough space for her blinds to go back and she could no longer open the window if the blinds went back in the previous place. Claire Williams had been to see the problem but it remained outstanding.

PM and SJ agreed to speak to all the residents about specific problems at the end

of the meeting.