

GRENFELL TOWER COMPACT MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2015

The meeting was arranged by the Grenfell Tower Compact for residents to meet with MP Victoria Borwick (VB), Cllr Judith Blakeman (JB) and Peter Maddison (PM) and Sacha Jevans (SJ) from the TMO. Throughout the meeting residents also raised matters of individual concern to themselves, which are collated at the end of these notes.

David Collins (DC) for the Compact said that residents wished to raise four issues:

1. The location and/or relocation of the HIUs

Residents recollected that at the July meeting with Victoria Borwick MP it was agreed that they could opt for either a hallway or kitchen location for the HIU. The kitchen option had previously been refused, although it had been offered as an option during the consultations at the very start of the programme. SJ said that the TMO had had to revise the project works once the builders got on site. JB said that this change and the reason for it had not been properly communicated and this was one of the main reasons why residents had lost all trust in the TMO.

PM stated that the HIU would have to be in the hallway unless the works had not started, 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 a move would be considered. JB asked for all the relevant financial information to be made available if it was decided that the units could not be moved from hallways to kitchens because of the additional cost.

DC said that the survey of all households that the Compact is conducting showed that a lot of work remained to be done and a number of matters had not progressed well. PM said that only three or four 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.

DC reported from the Compact survey that residents were still complaining that they felt harassed and threatened. There was a sense of distrust and fear of the TMO. The Compact had contacted 58 households so far. Although residents now felt more positive 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 and fear of losing their tenancy if they complained were still ongoing. PM said that all reports about specific issues would be investigated.

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 it would have to get court orders to enter flats where access was being denied. The Rydon contract had an end date, so legal action had become necessary.

VB asked the TMO to blitz all the outstanding work so that everyone would have heating and hot water by Christmas. She asked the TMO to visit every flat to ensure

that heating and hot water were available; then the other outstanding issues should be addressed.

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. She 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.

Compact members asked how the TMO could ensure that it could 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 residents.

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 his exit would be impeded. It was just plain silly to put the HIU there when there was ample room in the kitchen.

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 and also meant furniture could not be brought in and out. PM said he would investigate this concern.

Other issues raised were "cracking noises" next 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 it took from 8 am to 6.30 pm on one day and then a further four hours the following day; and problems taking time off work and works not being finished in time.

Residents also complained about "buck passing" between Rydon and the TMO. PM 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.

A general complaint was that TV aerials were not turned back on when works were completed.

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.

2. An independent investigation into what had gone wrong, including into the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

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 said that the lack of trust and fear of the TMO needed to be investigated independently.

DC asked on behalf of the Compact for an independent person 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 and the TMO.

3. The state of the building and making everything good at the end of the process

There is no money in the project to redecorate the stairwells, although they are in a disgraceful state and possibly dangerous in places. The lifts have also suffered badly during the programme of works and need to be brought back into a decent condition.

4. Compensation for residents who had spent their own money making works good in their homes

The requirement to produce receipts to claim compensation had not been communicated to anybody. Residents would not necessarily have them to hand, so would be permanently out of pocket through no fault of their own.

This matter was not addressed before the meeting was closed, owing to time pressures.

Matters raised of concern to individual householders

Complaints from flats 145 and 126 had not been addressed.

Fahed Barakat (FB), flat 92, had used the complaints procedure to ask for the HIU to be put 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 his request would not be addressed. However, he had not been told 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.

FB was concerned that he had not been able to exhaust the complaints procedure but had been left without heating for over four weeks. 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, a decision had been taken only to offer the hallway. There had been no consultation with residents about this change. Two-way communication between the TMO and the residents did not work. Customer Service at the TMO is not communicating with residents either. SJ said that these matters are specific to Grenfell Tower, so Customer Service would not become involved.

PM said that FB's system had already been disconnected, which was why the HIU had to go in the hallway. FB said that he was disconnected in April, but no works

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

FB referred also to broken tiles in his flat. A large hole that had been drilled into the wall was just covered by extra-large boxing in to conceal the damage, and the blinds and curtains are 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. He also mentioned the pipe above his fuse box and felt this was unsafe. He also cannot now pivot furniture into the flat through the hallway.

There was then a lengthy discussion on a range of concerns 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 not being kept, windows not being installed correctly - flats 205, 174, 122 and 126 were cited during these discussions.

Flat 64 was also cited as encountering problems because the resident is disabled and this had not been taken into account.

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

Flats 85 and 75 both said that they had bad smells in the sitting room and lavatory; flat 85 also 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. Flat 85 had also lost his TV for five days. Flat 75 wanted an assurance that the smells would be gone by Christmas. Both householders complained about buck passing between Rydon and the TMO.

The resident of flat 205 has disabilities and 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 her individual bill. She said that the ventilation in the lavatory was not turned back on at first and when it was, it was too noisy. This went on for four months. There is also a lot of noise coming from the roof during the night. She has complained to Rydon, who said it is 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 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.

Flat 206 had not had hot water for three months.

Steve Power (SP) flat 122 said that he had been left without heating for five days. He also passed a letter from Rydon on a separate matter to VB, who said it was unsatisfactory.

PM and SJ agreed to speak to all the residents about their specific problems at the end of the meeting.