

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee at the Kensington Town Hall at 6.30pm on Wednesday 6 January 2016

A4. GRENFELL TOWER - VERBAL ITEM

Ms Johnson set out a general summary of the scope of works that had been completed at Grenfell Tower. She confirmed the considerable £10.3 million spend and that the timetable had slipped so that the final completion of the works, including the playground, would be February 2016. She said that the TMO had worked closely with Rydon and the residents of Grenfell Tower and had representatives available on site 5 days per week.

Ms Johnson confirmed that the works had been intrusive and would have undoubtedly been difficult for residents who would have faced considerable disturbance during the works, especially when access to individual homes was required. She explained the issues in relation to the positioning of the boilers which had originally been planned to have been installed in the kitchens of individual units but it had then been considered easier to place these boilers in the hallways which had been conveyed to residents.

Ms Johnson added that Grenfell Tower had been in desperate need of refurbishment and the heating system had been a big issue. She said that the new cladding improved the look of the building and the Boxing Club was excited about their new facilities. She confirmed the nursery was now on the ground floor and had greater visibility.

Mr Black agreed with Ms Johnson's assessment of the works and progress and said that the TMO Board had addressed every issue that had been put to them. He said that he recognised the difficulties faced by the residents but that the improvements had been delivered.

Mr Edward Daffarn, lead representative of the Grenfell Tower Residents Association, was given an opportunity to address the Committee. He thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak to them about the problems that had been faced by residents over the past three years. He highlighted six main issues in his representation, namely:

1. The lack of consultation and residents engagement. He said the Residents Association was ignored and there was a failure to organise regular meetings.
2. The boilers being placed in hallways without consultation and warning. He explained that some boilers had been located in the original position in the kitchen whilst boilers in the hallways were a danger to small children.
3. The residents had experienced threats, harassment, lies and intimidation. He said that people with vulnerabilities had been targeted by the TMO and some were told that they would not have heating if they did not provide access to workmen.
4. The lack of response to legitimate complaints.
5. Poor workmanship and site management and gave examples of this to the Committee including residents that had not had access to hot water and one that had not had access to a functioning toilet for three days.

6. The issue of compensation which he said had been proposed as £50. He suggested a figure of £1500 would be more appropriate.

He concluded that there was a need for urgent scrutiny of the management of the works that had been carried out which needed to be conducted as an independent investigation. He said residents had been belittled, ignored or side-lined and their day-to-day concerns downplayed. He said that it was vital that lessons are learned for any future works and the problems experienced not replicated.

A copy of Mr Daffarn's full statement has been placed on the Minute Book.

Cllr Blakeman said that it was important that an examination of the project be conducted so that the Council could learn from the experiences of the residents of Grenfell Tower. She said that there had been a mismatch of information between what had been reported and what the residents were actually experiencing. She said that the newsletter sent to residents in relation to the boilers had been incomprehensible and the residents would not have understood the importance. Cllr Blakeman reported that there had been two babies born during the works that had special needs and no respite was provided for these families. She said that a number of individual complaints had been submitted but had not been responded to and this may lead to residents approaching the Housing Ombudsman. She said she could provide specific examples where required.

In relation to the positioning of the boilers, the residents were told at the consultation that if they were placed in the hallway they would be flush with the ledge but where they had been positioned stuck out approximately 8 inches and a child could easily bump their head on it. She added that residents who wanted them to be moved to the kitchen had been told this could happen if there was any surplus money.

Cllr Mackover thanked the residents for attending and presenting to the Committee. He said that he had noted down the main issues and the Scrutiny Committee was the correct forum to bring these issues. He confirmed he had visited Grenfell Tower and had seen the works in December 2015. Cllr Mackover suggested that a Working Group could have a look at the lessons learned for future regeneration projects and he would be happy to chair this Group. He stressed that the Group would not be set up to investigate individual complaints or issues but to look at how things could have been done better with the focus on an 'Outcome Review'.

Cllr Berrill-Cox agreed that a Working Group would be the best mechanism to conduct a review and look at the lessons learned. He said that it was important to look at what consultation proposals were in place for any future projects.

Mr Maddison reported on the consultation that had taken place in relation to Grenfell Tower. He said that at the outset there had been a number of public meetings. He explained that 65 households had indicated a preference for individual letters or drop-in sessions and they had acted on that basis. In relation to the location of the boilers, he explained that the TMO have said they would review the positioning and have listened to the residents concerns in this regard. He reported that there had been a number of meetings with the Compact and they were happy to continue that dialogue.

Mr Black added that the TMO was willing to talk to the residents and he was committed to resolving all outstanding issues. He also said he would be happy to take part in a Working Group. He said that he had not agreed with a lot that had been said at the Committee and there was a complaints

system in place to deal with any complaints. He explained the three stage process and he said that although there may still be some complaints that are in the process of being dealt with, to his knowledge the TMO had responded to all complaints raised. He said that if something had been missed he apologised and would be happy to pick up these issues. The Chairman said that it was important that people are properly informed of how to make complaints and Mr Black confirmed the TMO had a dedicated complaints team for this purpose.

Cllr Press said that Grenfell Tower was the first example of the regeneration of a Tower in the Borough and as good practice there should be a review of how the project went and she would support a recommendation for a Working Group on the matter. She said that Cllr Blakeman's comments that the Group needed to be independent with the resources and skills necessary. She said an independent reviewer may be useful to give expertise.

The Chairman said that if a Working Group was established then it would decide on what resources it needed and its scope. He said however that he was reluctant to establish another Working Group until those in existence had reported. He suggested that a Group was not set up immediately and that urgent complaints should be dealt with through the TMO process.

Cllr Pascall said that it would be important for any Working Group to look at the novation of the landscaping works and how that work had been budgeted and spent separately. He added that it was also important that the liquidation of two sub-contractors be looked at and lessons learned from that in relation to the sub-contractor procurement process.

Ms Johnson reported that once the project had been completed the TMO Board would be conducting their own review and this could help any Scrutiny Working Group with their Terms of Reference and act as one source of information.

Cllr Blakeman said to the Committee that a number of people did not understand the complaints procedure and often things had been implemented before the complaint had been addressed. She explained that there was no mechanism for collective complaints, for example when a lift wasn't operational or lack of CCTV. The Chairman asked if there was a procedure for collective complaints or if each individual had to log a complaint separately. He suggested there may be a gap in governance in this respect as there should be a process to allow a group to complain and permit the aggregation of a complaint. He recommended that the TMO look at their procedures in this regard. Mr Black agreed to do this.

Action: Mr Black

In conclusion the Chairman agreed that a Working Group would be commissioned at some point in the future but that this was dependant on a number of factors including the conclusion of existing Working Groups and the review work conducted by the TMO.