

Extract from Minutes of a Meeting of the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee at Kensington Town Hall at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 16 July 2014

PRESENT

Members of the Committee

Councillor Quentin Marshall (Chairman)
Councillor Tony Holt (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Emma Dent Coad, MA
Councillor Robert Mingay
Councillor Will Pascall
Councillor Linda Wade

Others in Attendance

Councillor Rock Feilding-Mellen (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Regeneration)
Councillor Judith Blakeman (Labour Group Leader)
Nick Austin (Director for Environmental Health)
Robert Black (Chief Executive, TMO)
Sasha Jevans (Exec Director of Operations, TMO)
Yvonne Birch (Director of People and Performance, TMO)
Richard Buckley (Bi-borough Head of Environmental Health)
Jacqui Hird (Scrutiny Manager)
Laura Johnson (Director of Housing)
Roger Keane (General Needs Commissioner)
Peter Maddison (Director of Assets and Regeneration, TMO)
Steve Mellor (Group Finance Manager)
Anthony Parkes (Director of Financial Services, TMO)
Wendy Thomas (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Gillian Tobin (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Jerome Treherne (Governance Services)

A5. GRENFELL TOWER UPDATE

Mr Maddison summarised the TMO's work on the regeneration plans and said more work on costs was needed. He detailed the TMO's engagement with residents which was to continue.

He reported that the causes of power surges in May were uncertain but an arced cable had been discovered and cabling to all parts of the block had now been replaced. He confirmed that the block's electrical wiring was checked every 5 years under the existing maintenance contract.

He reported power surge protection for the block was now in place and there had been no reoccurrence of power surges and monitoring would continue. Mr Maddison confirmed that Grenfell Tower's mains cabling was separate from the Kensington Academy

and Leisure Centre cabling.

In response to questions from the Committee on insurance and damage to residents' possessions, Mr Maddison reported a log of all damaged electrical equipment was kept up to date. Some 40 properties had experienced some damage. Loss adjusters acting for the insurers were still to confirm the amount of compensation required and to advise on settlement of payments.

Mr Maddison reported that the smoke emitted from one flat had, on investigation proved to be steam and this problem had been resolved. Before May's power surge, the block had been assessed for fire risk and deemed to have full fire protection. In relation to the risk of smoke released into common parts, Ms Johnson reminded the Committee that all leaseholder doors had been fire risk assessed and leaseholders advised on the level of compliance to fire protection standards. She stated that her officers were seeking further advice on liability for fire risk.

Councillor Blakeman was invited to speak. She submitted a petition from the Grenfell Leaseholders' Association to the committee clerk. She was concerned that the TMO would find it difficult to regain trust because many residents believed the impact of the power surge had not been taken seriously enough and compensation for damaged electrical items had been delayed. She was surprised that those affected had been asked if the Council or TMO should be held to account.

Mr Black assured the Committee the TMO had taken this incident and the resulted damage to tenants' property seriously. The TMO he said took health and safety matters seriously. He noted some of the claims linked to the incident had been factually inaccurate. He highlighted the scale of the regeneration project and said that any delay to it was in order to ensure agreement on the best scheme possible that was within budget. He drew attention to the engagement activities with the residents which included a meeting to be attended by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member on 19 July.

In response to Councillors Blakeman and Dent Coad's concerns over the removal of the canopy, Ms Johnson emphasised the Planning Department understood there needed to be some protection from falling debris. Mr Black noted that one alternative could be modified windows that prevented debris falling out of them.

Mr Maddison reported on consultation over regeneration plans and agreed to ensure all ward councillors received any newsletters sent to Grenfell Tower residents. **Action:** Mr Maddison

In response to concerns from the Chairman over value for money,

Ms Johnson referred to the Cabinet's decision last year to allocate funding to regenerate the block. She pointed out the range of improvements that were not linked to the existing housing assets and included the provision of eight new hidden homes flats which would generate an income for the Housing Revenue Account. Councillor Blakeman noted the defective heating system once replaced would reduce utility costs for residents and Councillor Dent Coad encouraged officers to check how LBHF had successfully used various funding streams for the Edward Woods Estate improvements.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member in conclusion, said he understood residents' impatience with progress on regenerating the Tower but it was a significant investment and it was vital a high quality design resulted to improve the block and its appearance to residents in the surrounding area. He had recently discussed the proposals with the architect and TMO and believed residents would have good reason to regain any lost trust in the TMO soon.