

20 June 2017

Dear Ellie

The meeting arranged by the Safer Neighbourhood Board last night, although tense and distressing and very long, gave a great deal of reassurance that many outstanding issues are now being properly addressed.

However, I am very concerned that the housing situation remains far from clear. I do not criticise the Housing Minister, Alok Sharma, his commitments were very welcome indeed - but they were not clear and did not take account of the housing situation in Kensington and Chelsea. I would be grateful therefore if you can pass these enquiries on to the Response Team, as I do not yet have contact details for Eleanor Kelly.

The assurance that everyone will be rehoused within three weeks is welcome. However:

Who is "everyone"? Does this refer solely to the Grenfell Survivors; does it include the Evacuees, especially those who are too traumatised to return to their existing homes?

Is it intended that this will be temporary accommodation or permanent accommodation?

When I spoke to some of the Survivors yesterday they were adamant that, as they belong to a cohesive and longstanding community, when they are offered permanent rehousing, very many of them wish to be rehoused together and as close as possible to their lost homes so that they can rebuild their community. How can this wish be facilitated in North Kensington, given the housing policies of the present Council administration?

Grenfell Tower had 129 social rented homes (nine new homes were added as a part of the refurbishment). Is the local authority going to replace this with 129 new social rented homes or will it replace only sufficient new social rented homes to meet the needs of the Survivors?

The local community are aware that RBKC's current housing regeneration plans include a significant reduction in the provision of social rented homes (the statement that the square footage of social rented homes will remain the same is meaningless). Information provided to the Information Commissioner stated that the Council wishes to demolish and rebuild in order to meet the demand on its existing housing register. If it is only going to replace homes to the same square footage, this will do little to meet the current demand on the register, yet alone that which was emerged

from the Grenfell Tower disaster.

Will evacuees be forced to return to their homes? I have met with evacuees who under no circumstances wish to do so. Many are traumatised and will have PTSD as a result of what they have seen that they will for ever associate with their present homes. I have heard nothing yet about how their needs will be accommodated, either in the short or the longer term.

The trauma and PTSD will also affect many residents of neighbouring blocks who again may not wish to remain where they are, yet will have no rehousing opportunities within the immediate area, where their local community networks are situated.

There are many other housing queries that will need to be addressed in the coming months. At the moment I recognise that the priority is to provide suitable short term temporary accommodation for the Survivors. However, I do believe that we need to establish a Rehousing Task Force or Response Team to begin to get to grips with all these issues. Residents do not trust the Council and they argue that this tragedy will be used to hasten the removal of social rented homes from North Kensington.

Finally, there is a rumour emerging that RBKC has decided not to progress its regeneration plans for the adjacent Silchester Estate. Since many residents of this Estate are both traumatised by what they have seen and are also deeply worried about the long term future of their homes, I would be grateful if some comfort can be offered to them. If it is true that the plans have been shelved, please tell them as soon as possible. If there is any possibility that these plans remain on the table, please also let them know as soon as possible.

Many thanks.

Cllr Judith Blakeman