

MG1WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r 27. 2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s. 9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5B

URN

Statement of: Judith Blakeman

Age if under 18: Over 18

(if over 18 insert 'over 18') Occupation Retired

This statement (consisting of 13 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

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Date:

This statement is about my involvement with the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) and my knowledge of Grenfell Tower in London W11.

I am retired and am a Labour Councillor for Notting Dale Ward in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. I was first elected to the Council in 1978 for the former Kelfield Ward, until 1990 when I stood down from the Council. I was re-elected in 1994 to the former Avondale Ward. Ward boundaries have changed since then and I have represented Notting Dale ward since its creation in 2010. This ward includes the whole of the Lancaster West Estate and the Silchester Estate

At the time of the Grenfell Tower fire I shared the role of councillor for Notting Dale Ward with two other councillors – Robert Atkinson and Beinazir Lasharie (who stood down at the Council elections in 2018); Councillor Marwan Elnaghi was elected to succeed her in May 2018. As I am retired and my two colleagues are not, I do the bulk of the day-to-day work within the ward.

My responsibilities as councillor include holding twice monthly Saturday morning surgeries for ward residents, attending many meetings within the ward, such as those of residents associations as well as Council meetings and Scrutiny Committee meetings. I also walk around the ward most days to meet people and see for myself some of the things that are going on.

As a Council member I was on the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, and remain on the Licensing Committee and the Appeals Panel.

At the very end of 2013, as I was the Labour Group's housing spokesperson, I was appointed to serve as the Labour Group's nominee on the Board of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) as a non-executive director. All elected and appointed members of the Board have one vote. Members of the TMO Executive team do not have a vote but report to the Board. The Board met every quarter at the TMO head office in Kensington High Street.

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I do not hold any specific qualifications enabling me to be a councillor or TMO board member. I am not required to have any qualifications for the role of councillor other than being a British citizen and on the electoral role of the borough in question. However, I have had many years of work experience. I hold a master's degree in industrial relations and have a post graduate certificate in business studies.

My knowledge about Grenfell Tower is quite extensive as I have had much involvement with it over the years. Grenfell Tower is in Notting Dale Ward. I have done a lot of casework with and on behalf of many residents of the Tower before, during and after the refurbishment in 2014-16. I attended TMO Board meetings and many meetings with Tower residents, members of TMO staff, Rydon managers and the then Member of Parliament, Victoria Borwick. I have a great deal of paperwork relating to Grenfell Tower much of which I have already provided to police.

I was involved with the regeneration of the tower as a local ward councillor, a member of the RBKC Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, as a TMO Board member and as a member of the TMO Operations Committee. However, I had no day-to-day involvement in the decision making during the project and have no knowledge about the technical side of what went on. I was a member of the sub-committee that appointed Rydon as the contractor for the refurbishment works on the advice of the TMO's consultants and senior managers. I produce as my exhibit **JB/1** a copy of the agenda of that sub-committee meeting.

Safety concerns

I am aware that Janice Wray was the TMO's Head of Safety and in that role she was in charge of and directly responsible for fire safety management at Grenfell Tower. I also knew that the TMO commissioned an independent fire safety consultant. Since the fire and the media involvement, I now know the name of this person to be Carl Stokes, although I did not know his name and had not seen his report prior to the fire.

I understood that there were some meetings between Janice Wray, the fire safety consultant and the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and I was aware that RBKC as freeholder of Grenfell Tower had overall oversight of the refurbishment project.

Both before and during the refurbishment project, residents raised many concerns with me about the safety of the Tower, including the fact that there was only one fire escape. They were also very concerned when gas pipes were installed by National Grid (now Cadent) in the stairwell after the refurbishment. The residents had concerns about the smoke vents not working, the lack of lighting in the stairwell and the floors not being properly numbered. They felt that in the event of a fire, the fire brigade would not know what floor to go to. The numbering of the floors was changed during the refurbishment but this was not indicated clearly on the doors to the stairwell. It also took some time for fire safety instructions to be put up on each landing.

Fire safety was a big issue for the Grenfell Tower residents and this was the subject of arguments with the TMO. The residents would discuss their concerns with me and I would raise many of their issues with the TMO. I felt, as did the residents, that concerns regarding the fire risks were not being properly addressed by the TMO.

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In 2010, prior to the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, there was a fire on one of the landings and as far as I am aware, this was dealt with very efficiently. It was after this fire that residents first raised concerns over the smoke vents and lighting in the stairwell. I understand that they were told by the TMO that these matters would be resolved.

In 2012 at the request of the Grenfell Tower Leaseholders' Association (GTLA), I asked the TMO to request a fire inspection from the local fire brigade. The TMO subsequently advised me that this was carried out and no issues were raised as a result of their visit. The GTLA had also asked for a fire drill to be arranged but I do not believe that one was ever held.

Throughout the refurbishment and before the fire at Grenfell Tower, my two ward colleagues and I were constantly raising issues and concerns with the TMO. The TMO must have been well aware that both the residents and ward councillors felt that there were many matters that had not been properly addressed.

After publication of the report of the Coroner on the Inquest into the fire at Lakanal House, Janice Wray produced a comprehensive report for the TMO board on fire safety, setting out the recommendations that the Coroner set out in her report. This included one that after any major refurbishment, a full fire safety assessment should be carried out. I produce as my exhibit **JB/2** a copy of the report to the Board. However, as these recommendations were not translated into legislation or fire safety regulations, they were not adopted by the TMO after the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower.

Complaints

I am familiar with the TMO's complaints procedures. To raise any issue on behalf of a resident, either as a Member's Enquiry or complaint with the TMO it had to be addressed to complaints@kctmo.org. Some complaints were re-labelled enquiries by the TMO and so fell out of the complaints procedure.

The internal complaints process had three stages and each stage had to receive a response within a specified timeframe. Stage 1 involved consideration of the initial complaint; if the resident was not happy with the response it would go to a senior officer in Stage 2. If the resident was still not satisfied, it would go to Stage 3 where three members of the TMO board would meet the complainant and review the complaint. If the complaint had still not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, it could be referred to the Housing Ombudsman, whose decision was then final.

One complaint that went right through to the Housing Ombudsman was about the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower and was made by Mr Edward Daffarn. This complaint was sent by me on his behalf, as is the usual procedure for a formal complaint to an Ombudsman. Mr Daffarn's complaint was not upheld and the Board received a full report of this. The very same week, however, another complaint about the TMO from a resident of a different estate in Notting Dale Ward was upheld by the Ombudsman. Unlike Mr. Daffarn's complaint, however, this decision (in favour of the complainant) was not reported to the TMO Board.

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I have had few positive experiences with the TMO's complaints procedure and did not feel that the TMO dealt well with complaints. Many residents across the borough had contacted me with complaints against the TMO, which I took up on their behalf. I have many emails detailing these complaints

I have lately discovered that many of the complaints I made to the TMO were not registered and logged as complaints and were instead registered as member's enquiries, which are not reported under the Key Performance Indicators either to the TMO Board or to RBKC's Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee.

A complaint was only registered as a complaint if it was about the adequacy of the service of the TMO. I was informed that if I was writing to the TMO with a complaint I had to specify in the email that it was a complaint, yet often they refused to acknowledge it as a complaint. I was sometimes emailed back to say that I was not submitting a complaint but an enquiry. As stated above, the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) did not reflect the true position relating to complaints and enquiries. .

Many concerns reported to me by TMO residents throughout the borough were about lift breakdowns. However, the TMO only registered lift breakdowns if they were out of action for more than 48 consecutive hours and there was only one lift in the building. Again, this meant the statistics were never a true reflection of what was happening, with residents often trapped in lifts for long periods, and people with mobility issues living in blocks where lifts stopped only at alternative floors could be trapped at home for several days. I asked the TMO several times to amend this KPI but was told that the KPIs were set by RBKC and the TMO would need their permission to change them.

Grenfell Action Group

The application for planning permission for the Kensington Academy and Leisure Centre (KALC) project was widely opposed at the Planning Committee hearing, including by the ward councillors. This application included the development of 32 new private flats and changes to the road layout. Those opposing the application were concerned that the site would be over-developed and that a proposed road closure would reduce access to Grenfell Tower in the event of a fire. Prior to submission of the planning application the right of way on the pedestrian road behind Grenfell Tower (Station Walk) was extinguished without any public consultation.

The Grenfell Action Group (GAG) blog was set up in 2010 by Francis O'Connor and Edward Daffarn, respectively residents of Verity Close and Grenfell Tower "to oppose the Kensington Academy and Leisure Centre development which was considered to be a gross overdevelopment of an inappropriate site involving the destruction of Lancaster Green, one of the few local green spaces, and the only residential amenity space available for the residents of the immediately adjacent Grenfell Tower".

Initially they had asked the ward councillors to oppose the building of the school. We refused to do this as a new secondary school was desperately needed in North Kensington and it had been Labour Group policy since the 1990s to support the construction of a

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secondary school in the north of the borough. We worked with the GAG and others to try and persuade the Council to choose an alternative site, without success. The one concession the Council agreed was to find the funds to refurbish Grenfell Tower, which had been seriously neglected for many years.

Grenfell Tower refurbishment

The council had overall responsibility for the Grenfell Tower project, but the TMO was in charge of it. Claire Williams was the project manager, who reported to the Director of Assets and Regeneration, Peter Maddison. He in turn reported to Sacha Jevans, the Executive Director of Operations and she reported to the chief executive – Robert Black. I do not know the name of the company responsible for the project management of the regeneration.

My ward colleagues and I attended several of the consultation meetings held with residents of the Tower before the refurbishment began. I was also a member of the sub-committee, which recommended the bid from Rydon, further to the advice of the consultants commissioned by the TMO. During the tender process Mrs Edwards and I, as the resident representatives, interviewed the resident engagement officer of each of the shortlisted contenders.

Throughout the refurbishment project I visited many residents, particularly when they had concerns and complaints. After the refurbishment was completed I worked with Mr Daffarn and Mr Willie Thompson, both residents of the Tower, to draw the TMO's attention to the outstanding problems.

I was not involved in the day-to-day management of the project nor with any of the changes that were made during the life of the project. For example, I was not aware of changes to the materials specified for the refurbishment of the Tower. I have no expertise in such matters. Since the fire, I have reviewed the documents in my possession. I was aware that the residents were invited to choose what cladding they would like to see added to the building. They were told that the purpose of the cladding was to improve the look of the building as well as to provide better insulation for the flats. The residents were shown different samples of cladding and approved zinc cladding although I do not believe that any of the residents were experts and I assume their decision was based mainly on aesthetics. The zinc cladding was subsequently changed to aluminium cladding, but this was not specifically brought to the attention of the TMO Board or the TMO Operations Committee at the time. I do not know if planning permission was required for the change.

It was reported to the TMO Operations Committee that the provider of the cladding went in to liquidation, but the cladding that had been chosen could still be obtained. The material for the cladding was never discussed in any of these meetings, only that it would improve the insulation and looks of the building. I do not know who signed off the change in cladding.

During the refurbishment a number of residents raised with me problems that they were having. For example, I raised one complaint for a resident living near the top of the building. Her flat had been flooded by some of the work being done by Rydon, so the TMO

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arranged for a cleaner to go in to the flat. The resident was told that any claim for compensation that she had was against Rydon and not the TMO. The cleaner sent to the flat stole the spare front door key from the hallway and returned later to the premises. He was unaware that the tenant's daughter was at home and tried to get in. The daughter swiftly put the chain on the door, so he was unable to enter. The police were called and when the resident later attempted to make a complaint, the TMO refused to deal with it. The TMO argued that this was a matter for the police and the flooding claim was a matter for Rydon. I was very concerned that the TMO had absolved itself of all responsibility for this incident.

There were also many complaints about the introduction of HIU's (Heating Interface Unit) into the flats. The HIU's were originally meant to be in the kitchens, but I understood that Rydon took the view that this was too complex and would be too expensive, so they agreed with the TMO to install them in the hallways. In some of the flats where this was carried out, the HIU stuck out up to 8 inches, impeding the entrance to the flats. Although the TMO had mentioned changing the installation of the HIU's into the hallways in one of their newsletters, this was only a vague reference and there was no consultation with the residents about the change.

There was a 2-bed show flat for residents to view how the final works would look, where the HIU had been installed in the hallway flush to the wall. However, as residents had been promised that the HIU's would be installed in the kitchens, not the hallways, many of them refused Rydon entry to their premises to install the Units in their hallways. This was such a matter of concern that I had a meeting with Peter Madison to discuss the problems. I was told that it was only "about 12 residents" who were refusing access. However, when I next visited the Tower, I noticed at least 29 flats with notices on the door refusing access to Rydon. Some of those who refused entry received threats of legal action and/or the loss of their tenancy. This matter was only resolved when residents involved the then Kensington Member of Parliament, Victoria Borwick. It was then agreed that HIU's could be installed in the kitchens, as long as the work hadn't already begun. The residents who obtained this concession had to sign a disclaimer to say they accepted the extra disruption this would cause.

Other refurbishments were due to take place at other towers on the borough. As a result I provided a detailed note to the TMO Board about lessons to be learned from this project, stating, for example, that communication with the residents should be very clear. This was sent directly to all members of the TMO board but it was not endorsed as a guide for other potential tower block works. I produce as my exhibit **JB/3** a copy of the note.

Rydon had their own complaints procedure during the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower and I believe that they received many complaints. At one meeting with residents held in the show flat, Simon Lawrence, one of the Rydon managers, took details from a number of residents who had complaints. He said he would visit each of them to discuss their concern. However, this did not happen and when I asked, I was told that he had left Rydon's employment shortly afterwards. I do not know if anyone else from Rydon followed up these complaints.

Post-refurbishment

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Once the refurbishment was completed, there were many outstanding concerns and complaints from residents. The stairwell had never been part of the refurbishment although it was the only stairwell and was also the only fire escape. This stairwell was very unpleasant. It was completely enclosed, so to me it felt claustrophobic and it was meant to have safety lighting in the event of a fire. I never noticed any smoke vents. The stairwell needed redecoration and some of the stair treads were loose. It was filthy and very smelly and residents complained of anti-social behaviour occurring there, including drug dealing.

As far as I am aware, the complaints about the stairwell were never addressed, during or after the refurbishment. I asked for the issues to be addressed but I was told that there was no money allocated for this within the refurbishment programme, I was also told that perhaps some funds could be found in a later financial year.

Gas pipes

One incident after the completion of the refurbishment was the installation of new gas pipes inside the stairwell. National Grid, which is now known as Cadent, had found that one of the gas pipes leading into the Tower was no longer fit for purpose and said that it needed to be changed. However, they were unable to change it on the exterior of the building because of the cladding that had been installed. Without any consultation, either with the residents or with the TMO, they began to install pipes inside the stairwell. This caused consternation and fear amongst many residents, who felt that this was compromising the safety of the stairwell. The new gas pipes went up the stairwell, right across the tops of the hallway and then into each flat.

Residents, including the GTLA complained to me and to many others at the TMO and the Town Hall about the fact it was a fire escape stairwell badly affected by anti-social behaviour. They asked for the pipes to be boxed in, in order to reassure them about fire safety. I e-mailed the Council about this, and their response was that because National Grid was a public utility, they could carry these works out without permission or consultation. I produce as my exhibit **JB/4** a copy of that correspondence.

Following the refurbishment, residents received no advice about fire safety and only after several representations were instructions as to what to do in the event of a fire installed on the walls of the communal hallways. The advice was to stay put in their flat (unless that was where the fire was) and await rescue by LFB, which would happen. It was left to the residents themselves to be proactive in order to obtain this advice.

The "stay put" policy in place at Grenfell Tower worked in 2010 but I do not know how far the integrity of the compartmentation of each flat was damaged by the refurbishment, and the installation of the new gas pipes. The "stay put" policy was subsequently reiterated to residents across the whole of the borough.

As three new floors had been added at the bottom of the building, the floor numbers on the doors to the stairwell were no longer accurate. Again it was left to the residents and me as ward councillor to ask for the floors to be re-numbered so that the Fire Brigade would know which floor was which in the event of any fire.

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There were also many complaints that the new windows were smaller and had not been properly fitted. One resident had tested the temperature in their flat – before and after the refurbishment - and found that it was colder in the flat after the refurbishment. The householder believed that it was because the windows had not been properly installed. The main concerns were the gaps at the edges of the windows and the resultant draughts. The TMO was certainly aware of draughts being reported.

Following the refurbishment I worked with two residents Mr Daffarn and Mr Thompson and together we drew up a matrix of outstanding problems. This was sent to the TMO and I requested regular updates. The matrix was a table highlighting some of the outstanding problems, with a further column for the TMO and/or Rydon to set out what actions they were taking to address the issues. Fire safety was an issue included in this matrix and the fact that the stairwell hadn't been included in the refurbishment. I produce as my exhibit **JB/5** copies of the matrix from August 2015 and May 2016.

Following the refurbishment and as a result of the amount of concerns raised by the residents, David Collins, who was the Chair of the Residents' Compact Group and who had some building expertise, lodged a formal complaint with the TMO about the fire safety arrangements. He submitted a detailed document covering a number of complaints to Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. He was not satisfied with the response and asked that it be referred to stage 2, so that it could ultimately reach the Housing Ombudsman. However, when he referred it to Stage 2, the TMO told him that it was an enquiry rather than a complaint, so he could not use the complaints procedure. David emailed me about this, complaining about the TMO's behaviour. I produce as my exhibit **JB/6** a copy of this correspondence.

The GTLA also asked for an independent fire safety assessment after the refurbishment, and asked for funding to enable them to commission an independent expert. However, this request was refused by the TMO. The TMO said it was not needed as their internal Health and Safety officer, Janice Wray had completed one, as had an independent fire consultant. Furthermore, these assessments had been approved by the LFB. I referred the matter on to the RBKC Director of Housing, Laura Johnson, who agreed with the TMO response. I produce as my exhibit **JB/7** a copy of this correspondence.

The GTLA also asked for the London Fire Brigade to attend and carry out a fire drill, as they had in 2012 at Trellick Tower. I understand that this did not take place. The GTLA remained very concerned about fire safety at the Tower.

RBKC

The residents of the Tower were increasingly concerned at the TMO's persistent refusal to listen to them and their worries and asked me how they could take the matter further. I advised them that the Council had overall responsibility for Grenfell Tower and the best way to progress would be to draw up a petition for submission to the Council. A petition requesting an independent review of the way the refurbishment had been carried out was prepared and signed by many residents. I presented it at a council meeting and it was referred to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee for debate and response.

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When it reached the Scrutiny Committee, Mr Daffarn addressed the meeting as a representative of the Grenfell Tower Compact. He spoke of the abuse, incompetence and ill treatment of the residents of Grenfell Tower during the refurbishment at the hands of the TMO. At the meeting the TMO Chief Executive, Robert Black, said that the TMO itself would carry out the review of the way the refurbishment was handled and the Committee by a majority vote agreed with this way forward.

The TMO Board agreed to set up a sub-committee chaired by a Board member, Paula Fance to look at the way the refurbishment had been carried out. I understand that this review was carried out on a Saturday, starting with a desk top review of some of the associated paperwork. After the desk top review, the sub-committee visited Grenfell Tower, although I believe that they did not speak to any of the residents who had complained about the works to their flats. Further I believe that they only looked at the new flats that had been created on the new lower floors, and not the original flats, including those of which complaints had been made. They did look at the other new additions to the Tower – the nursery and the boxing club. The report also said that only seven complaints had been made during the refurbishment. I produce as my exhibit **JB/8** a copy of the report.

This report was sent to the TMO Board for consideration. The debate was left to the very end of a very long meeting and I said that I was very unhappy with much of what it contained. Given the lateness of the hour I said that I would put my concerns in writing for discussion at the next Board meeting. Subsequently I was invited to meet Paula Fance to discuss my concerns. When I attended the meeting, I found she was accompanied by Sacha Jevans and both of them urged me not to put my concerns in writing. However I did put them in writing and sent them to each Board member. I produce as my exhibit **JB/9** a copy of the report I sent.

At the following Board meeting I was reprimanded for sending my document to all Board members without the permission of the Chair and Chief Executive, and the Board declined to discuss my written concerns. Instead the Board endorsed the original report and resolved to forward it to the RBKC Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee. I produce as my exhibit **JB/10** a copy of the report to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee

Prior to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee I e-mailed all members of that committee also setting out some of my concerns with the report. When the Scrutiny Committee meeting began, the Chairman Cllr Quentin Marshall and the TMO Chief Executive Robert Black started the meeting by saying that as I was a TMO Board member, I had had my opportunity to express my concerns and I was forbidden to speak about the report. One of my colleagues tried to raise the issues set out in my e-mail but the Committee voted instead to endorse the TMO's internal review of how it had carried out the refurbishment. I produce as my exhibit **JB/11** my email to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee

As a result of this, the Grenfell Tower Compact members decided to carry out a satisfaction survey of all the residents in the Tower. This was carried out over a few weeks and I participated in one Sunday door knocking session with Antonio Roncolato, a resident of the Tower. The results of the Compact's satisfaction survey showed that many residents had

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been on the receiving end of lots of harassment and were very dissatisfied with the works. I believe that they may have asked for their survey to be presented to the Council.

The TMO then carried out their own satisfaction survey and said that they had contacted 90% of residents in 2 days, and only a few concerns had been raised. The TMO survey varied significantly from the Compact survey and it is hard to believe that the TMO had been able to carry out a full survey of all residents in only two days.

Grenfell Tower Compact

I worked closely with the residents throughout the refurbishment, in particular with Mr Daffarn, although on occasions in opposition to him. He was very active on behalf of all the residents but the ward councillors felt that sometimes he had an unrealistic expectation as to what opposition councillors could actually achieve on their behalf

An example of this is when the residents tried to form their own Residents Association, so that the TMO would consult directly with them. The TMO refused this request on the basis they were part of the wider Lancaster West Estate, and they should instead join that Estate's Residents' Association and consult through them. At that time the Estate association was rather inactive and the Grenfell Tower residents preferred to act on their own behalf. I reiterated the request for them to be able to form their own association but the TMO again refused. As a result the residents then went to their Member of Parliament, Victoria Borwick, for help who arranged a meeting between them and the TMO.

The TMO then agreed that they could set up a Residents Compact, which has fewer powers than a Residents' Association. At that time, the TMO also seemed to be stopping other estates from setting up Residents' Associations and instead were recommending that they had compacts.

I read the Grenfell Action Group blog regularly and was aware that I featured quite heavily in it from time to time. I occasionally mentioned to the TMO Chief Executive some of the more contentious issues raised by the GAG and his response was that nobody read it, himself included. The relationship between the TMO and the GAG was very poor.

Maintenance

The TMO was responsible for the maintenance of the tower. It had an internal company called Repairs Direct, whose operatives would carry out maintenance. For specialised tasks the TMO often used external contractors. The TMO had had poor experience when the entire repairs and maintenance responsibility was contracted out, which is why it set up the internal company, TMO Repairs Direct. Both Sacha Jevans and Barbara Matthews of the TMO Executive Team served on the board of Repairs Direct.

The hope and expectation of creating Repairs Direct was to make repairs more efficient, carried out better and in a more timely manner, and initially that appeared to happen. However, when RBKC took over responsibility for its housing stock from the TMO, I understand that there were over 3000 repairs outstanding.

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Fire risk assessment

I am aware that Francis O'Connor of the Grenfell Action Group, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request asking to see the most recent Fire Risk Assessment for Grenfell Tower. This was provided to him. It was a comprehensive report completed by Carl Stokes in 2012. Mr O'Connor provided me with a copy of this report after the fire in Grenfell Tower for my information.

FRA 'Fire Risk Assessments were not raised at Board meetings but at the end of the refurbishment programme the Board was advised that a fire safety assessment had been done, bi-monthly meetings with the Fire Brigade were taking place, the Council was involved, and no problems had been identified. The appointment of fire risk assessors was never discussed whilst I was on the board, but I believe Carl Stokes had been commissioned by the TMO before I became a board member so I don't know if it was discussed at that time.

TMO Board

As a TMO Board member I often raised residents' issues and as a result sometimes felt pressured by the TMO. For example at a board meeting in July 2015, I was instructed by the Chief Executive – Robert Black, to separate my interests as an elected councillor and my role as a company director and to abide by the Companies Act 2006, which included a duty to promote the success of the company. This caused me some concern, so I spoke to the Council's Legal Services Officer about my role on the TMO Board. She confirmed that my role as a non-executive director was to scrutinise and challenge the actions of the TMO and the decisions of the board where I thought they would not promote the success of the company, which was all that I felt I had done. The board felt I was bound by the collective responsibility of a Board member. I did not agree, because I was only on the board because I was/am an elected councillor, something which I have always made clear. If I felt that the company was going wrong, it was my job as a non-executive director to let them have my views.

I was invited by the company secretary Fola Kafidiya, to a meeting on 21st January 2016. It was a robust exchange of views and as a result, I sent a report to the Labour Group, as I was concerned about a number of issues. I produce as my exhibit **JB/12** a copy of the report. The TMO was concerned about my conflict of interest which came about due to the concerns I was raising about the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. The TMO felt that, as a board member, I should not be supporting residents with their complaints against the TMO.

The TMO was also concerned about the petition I had submitted to the council asking for an investigation in to how the TMO had managed the refurbishment. It was suggested that I hadn't given the TMO sufficient time to address the residents' concerns, but I have always made it clear that residents will be my priority. I was elected to represent the residents of Notting Dale ward and that is my primary role.

Miscellaneous matters

There have been several tower block fires in the borough. The 2010 Grenfell Tower fire, one at Adair Tower during Grenfell's refurbishment and two at Trellick Tower. As a consequence

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of the Adair Tower fire, the fire brigade served notices on the TMO and council, requiring them to carry out works at Adair and Hazelwood Towers. One of the issues raised was the absence of proper fire doors to flats opening on to communal hallways.

Before I joined the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee, there had been a programme to install self-closers on all flat doors that opened on to communal hallways. However, I have been to enough flats in Grenfell Tower canvassing, delivering leaflets or visiting residents to know that there were few if any self-closers on any of those doors.

The TMO undertook the replacement of non-fire rated doors with fire rated doors right across the borough. They made regular progress reports to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee and the TMO board, saying that most of the tenant doors in the tower were fine, but some of the leaseholder doors were not compliant.

Following the serving of the notices on the TMO and RBKC by the fire brigade there was a disagreement as to who was responsible for enforcing the leaseholders to change their front doors – the council initially said it was the responsibility of the fire brigade, but the fire brigade said it was the responsibility of the council. In the end, it was never resolved, but the council said they would ask the TMO to do it. A notice had to be served if the leaseholder failed to comply with the instruction to change their front door.

After the recent fire, when external consultants were brought in, it was found that a significant number of doors throughout the borough were not fire compliant and the Council and councillors were concerned that they had been misled by the TMO. The Council is still in the process of replacing them. Investigations at the Lancaster West Estate, for example, found that most of the doors, both of tenanted flats and leaseholder flats, were not fire resistant. They had clearly not been checked, despite assurances from the TMO to the Scrutiny Committee that all the leaseholder doors except for a couple had been checked.

Regular reports had been made to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee and to the TMO board identifying the number of leaseholder doors which were not compliant until *it was reported that* there were just two left. Both the TMO Board and the Scrutiny Committee were therefore of the belief that all tenanted doors were compliant. I do not know who at the TMO provided these reports/updates.

I would say that generally, the TMO treated the residents and ward councillors with a fair amount of disdain. Any issues raised were deemed an exaggeration and it seemed that the TMO believed that ward councillors were being pushed by the Grenfell Action Group as we didn't like what was being written about us. This was not the case. Although some of the things that appeared on the GAG blog about the ward councillors were unjustified, other matters raised by GAG were absolutely justified. However, as I mentioned above GAG's apparent belief that if the ward councillors had opposed the school, it wouldn't have been built was unrealistic.

The attitude of the ruling Conservative Group on the council was that they were elected to run the whole borough and they would run it as they saw fit. The residents' concerns were just not listened to. This attitude is changing now but rather slowly.

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Continuation of Statement of: Judith Blakeman

On the day of the fire, senior officers of both the TMO and the Council were nowhere to be seen. To the best of my knowledge they gave no press statements and the Council's head of communications handed in his resignation and left the building. I was left effectively to run a media centre from my own home with two colleagues for the next couple of weeks. I felt that I had to answer questions from the media as to not do so would have looked very bad. Immediately after the Grenfell Tower fire, I gave lots of media interviews saying that many concerns had been raised but ignored by the TMO. Much later the TMO claimed that by doing this, I breached the TMO code of conduct which states that Board members should not do anything which brings the TMO in to disrepute. However, the code of conduct also says that Board members have to observe the Nolan Principles, which include the requirement to be open and transparent. After the fire, I invited the police to interview me and take documents and data. This appeared to concern the TMO until my solicitors reminded the TMO that it had undertaken to provide all relevant information to the police.

Like many local residents I was diagnosed with mild PTSD as a result of witnessing the horror of the fire, It was while I was experiencing some effects that the TMO invited me to attend an interview with a sub-committee of the Board, comprising three Board members, the company secretary and the TMO's solicitor to discuss the view that I had brought the TMO into disrepute, As I was told I would have to come alone, without either a "friend" or my solicitor, I declined to attend this meeting. I put forward a counter proposal to meet them and be interviewed in a neutral setting, accompanied by my solicitor and with an independent note taker. I received no reply to this counter-proposal, and was instead invited to resign from the TMO Board. This I also declined to do and subsequently the TMO terminated my Board membership, in writing, claiming this was because I had breached the TMO code of conduct.

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