

D R A F T

GRENFELL TOWER BOARD REVIEW

Board Report 31 March 2016

Ward Councillors' Response

2. Background

2.1 The residents of Grenfell Tower have been at the forefront of major building works since the Academy and Leisure Centre project began at the end of 2012. Other residents, particularly in Treadgold House and Verity Close, were also inconvenienced by the works, but only at Grenfell was this then followed by the project to refurbish the Tower with residents *in situ*. This began in June 2014 and is not yet finally complete. Residents had hoped it would run concomitantly with the other projects but the logistics, such as moving equipment and materials to and from all three sites, made this impossible. This means that Grenfell people have endured all the difficulties of living on a building site throughout that whole period, over three years of unremitting disruption.

2.4 Resident consultation on the Grenfell project began with open meetings but these were discontinued because of the difficult behaviour of some attendees. This is why residents then indicated their preferred approaches to resident engagement as stated in the report. However, they also realised early on that they still needed a mechanism for collective consultation. So they set up Grenfell Community Unite, but all representations made by Unite on their behalf were ignored and received neither acknowledgment nor response from the TMO.

2.5 I explained at a consequential meeting with the Unite officer that the correct way to make collective representations was either through the Lancaster West Residents' Association or the ward councillors. Since the RA at that time was not functioning, the residents opted to establish Grenfell Tower Compact, with the agreement of the TMO. In the meantime, a number of issues of common concern were raised by the councillors on behalf of the residents. But again, although we received some replies, many of our representations were also ignored. On following them up, we were advised that we had to register every representation through the TMO complaints procedure in order to receive replies.

2.7 I was invited by the Company Secretary to feed into the TMO review suggestions on issues that they should consider investigating. I made a couple of suggestions but I do not know if they were they taken on board. It is not clear either whether the review group considered the results of the resident survey undertaken by the Compact towards the end of 2015. The contents of the "full pack for the day" provided to the review group are not itemised for information. Neither

does the report indicate how many residents the review group spoke to on their tour of Grenfell Tower.

3. Resident Consultation and Engagement

3.2 I do not know whether the review group conducted a desktop review of all the written communications. I have done so and am concerned that some of these, in particular on the change of location of the HIU into the hallway, were unclear and hard to understand.

3.3 The Rydon RLO profiles on each resident were clearly incomplete and were not always acted on. For example, they did not prepare for the birth of two babies during the duration of the project. Neither did they identify that one resident is illiterate and had been awaiting some major repairs to his flat since 2013, which they could have reported to the TMO. This omission was discovered by the Grenfell Tower Compact and progressed through the complaints procedure by a ward councillor.

The situation of the new-borns and their mothers has been the subject of correspondence between the TMO and me and has not been satisfactorily resolved. I hoped the review group would consider this correspondence, but this appears not to have happened.

4. Position of the HIU in the Hallway

4.1 This is the issue that caused the most ill-feeling between the residents and the TMO. The removal of the kitchen option for siting the HIU was badly communicated. I cannot agree with the group's finding that "there was sufficient consultation with residents over the positioning of the HIU". The TMO's positive response to accommodate requests of some residents to locate the HIU in the kitchen came only after Victoria Borwick MP had convened a meeting between residents, the TMO and herself. Prior to that meeting, the ill-feeling of residents escalated to an unacceptable level and representations made on their behalf by ward councillors were rejected.

5. Allegations of Threats, Lies and Intimidation by the Contractor and the TMO

At the end of 2015 I assisted the Compact with a survey of residents' views of the way in which the Grenfell Tower project had been handled. Some residents did tell me that they had felt pressured by the TMO and Rydon, more especially by the TMO. It is not surprising that they do not wish to put their heads above the parapet and formally complain to the TMO. I believe that they will, however, be prepared to discuss their concerns with the working group to be set up by the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee.

"Threats, lies and intimidation" are not words that I would have used. However, I believe that I was misled by the TMO on at least a couple of occasions. Firstly, I was informed that there had never been an option to put the HIU in the kitchens, although I knew there had been, as Cllr Atkinson and I were present at the meetings where this was offered. When I re-read this response, I saw that it was ambiguous and referred only to the moment when Rydon started on site and had determined that it would be too complicated to install the HIU in the kitchen. Secondly, when a number of residents were refusing entry to Rydon and the TMO I asked how many were involved. I was told that it was around 12 households, which I reported in good faith. I was then told by the Unite officer that the figure was closer to 40 households. My subsequent investigations – which are incomplete - showed that at least 20 households were refusing access.

It can be very difficult for ward councillors to represent residents if they are not given correct information. Generating distrust between councillors and their constituents is a very serious matter. It was quite difficult to restore this trust and we are grateful to the efforts of the Compact and the Unite officer and Victoria Borwick MP for their assistance in this.

6. Response to Complaints

6.2 I am baffled by the statement that only four residents submitted formal complaints, whereas ward councillors submitted "a number of enquiries". I submitted formal complaints on behalf of 14 separate households. Some have been resolved satisfactorily, some have not been resolved satisfactorily but the resident has "given up". I still await final responses to two complaints, which I shall follow up. Furthermore, at the second meeting convened with Victoria Borwick MP in December 2015, a number of other residents raised complaints. At that meeting Lady Borwick urged the TMO to accept them at face value and not require them to be processed first through the bureaucracy of the complaints procedure. (See attached notes of that meeting)

I cannot agree with the review group's finding that the TMO responded adequately to all complaints and issues, nor that only seven formal complaints were made, or that all the ward councillors' "enquiries" were answered satisfactorily.

6.5 Throughout the duration of the project, no process was in place for common issues to be raised and this was highlighted by the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Committee have asked the TMO to draw up an appropriate procedure for collective complaints and provide it to them. As explained earlier, as ward councillor I raised a number of common issues on behalf of residents but received dilatory responses that did not always fully address the matter and often only after sending reminders.

It seems (from a complaint I raised subsequently concerning the Henry Dickens Court Estate) that the TMO will be proposing that when there are common issues of concern, all residents affected by the issue will be required formally and individually to complain. This seems to build in an unnecessary and probably unrealistic bureaucratic step into the process.

If the MP can convene an effective meeting between senior TMO officers and residents when there are common issues to be raised (for example, as recently at Treadgold House), then the TMO should offer a similar effective process to the ward councillors and to resident association committees. Otherwise we shall have no option but to engage with the Member of Parliament each time matters of common concern arise. It should not be necessary to involve the MP on every occasion and the TMO should provide an effective procedure for engagement with ward councillors across the borough.

The finding of the group that "the Company's current complaints procedure would be able to respond to a group complaint where it related to a communal area affecting a number of residents" was not put in effect during the Grenfell Tower refurbishment project. Nor were residents told at any time that the complaints procedure could permit this. This failure to address issues of common concern is probably the second most important cause of ill-feeling between Grenfell residents and the TMO.

8. Compensation

8.2 The view of the ward councillors is that compensation for residents is a matter for the Council and should not be included in the overall cost of the Grenfell Tower refurbishment project. As stated, these residents have been living on a building site for over three years to facilitate two prestigious flagship Council projects and at times the situation has seemed intolerable to them.

The Council has saved a huge amount of money by refurbishing the Tower rather than demolishing it and re-providing the homes elsewhere. This was apparently the original proposal, but it would have cost in the region of £25 million rather than the £10.3 million spent on refurbishment with everyone in residence.

Some residents did incur additional costs purely because of the Grenfell Tower works. For example, the mother of one of the new-borns spent a lot of money taking her baby out each day to friends, neighbours or family. The Rydon RLO had only offered this mother respite in the show flat, thus missing the point that she was concerned about the damaging effects of the daily noise, dust and disturbance of the building works on her baby.

Other residents have spent money on materials to make good the Rydon works

beyond the £50 offered (and some residents have apparently not yet been offered the £50). Another household incurred loss after being flooded and has been unable to obtain full compensation from Rydon's insurers.

The ward councillors believe that all residents should receive some form of *ex gratia* payment from the Council to acknowledge their fortitude during what was a very taxing three years. Unfortunately the Council has already rejected this claim. The TMO should support the residents in this request.

Conclusions

The Residents' Revolt

It is a fact that most of the residents who refused entry to their flats have had the HIU located in their position of choice, whereas residents who co-operated, albeit with reluctance, have had the HIU located in the hallway. Although some of them are content, others wish to have it moved to their preferred location. The TMO has undertaken to review all requests once the project is finished. Residents acknowledge this, but expect then to be told that it will be far too expensive to move them.

In effect, therefore, the TMO has rewarded bad behaviour, something that residents of the other estates due for regeneration will no doubt consider.

Visits during the Building Works

So far as we are aware, apart from Rydon, TMO and RBKC officers, only the Member of Parliament, her caseworker and the three ward councillors carried out regular visits to Grenfell Tower to observe how the building works were progressing and to speak to residents. This concerns us, since we suspect that the work that the review group carried out is essentially a *post hoc* paper exercise, with a visit just to look at some of the completed works. The review group report refers primarily to the policies that were put in place and it is not clear how robustly the group tested these policies against the practice.

The residents' survey carried out by the Compact in November shows a rather different picture and the results from the TMO's December survey differ markedly from the Compact results. We do not know what questions the TMO staff asked of residents, so it is difficult to analyse the reasons for these differences.

Finally, we are aware of a current groundswell of concerns about the TMO throughout the borough. We must therefore ask the TMO to consider seriously whether producing a report that will be seen as written from the managerial perspective and without resident input assists the TMO's reputation – or its chances of rebuilding a good relationship with the residents of Grenfell Tower.

Councillor Judith Blakeman,

on behalf of the Notting Dale Ward Councillors

13 April 2016