

GRENFELL TOWER EMERGENCY PARTY MEETING 19 JUNE 2017

We have just lived through the worst event in the Borough's history.

Our normal processes are not fitted to the task of dealing with such an emergency.

I called this meeting because I know that the last few days have been the most challenging that any of us can ever remember.

The Council has come under unprecedented criticism both for the events leading up to the fire, and for its response since. It has also been caught in the vortex of a violent media storm.

It is currently the focus of a huge amount of political activity at a time when the new Government is under attack by a re-invigorated Labour Party which favours direct action.

There are two conflicting priorities as I see it.

- One is to provide support to the victims of the fire and their relatives and to ensure that there is appropriate support on the ground.
- The other is to communicate what we are doing as authoritatively as possible to the press, the community and the Council.

In both instances we have been found wanting because the tragedy is of such a scale and so complex that our own

resources quickly proved inadequate. Although Council staff were on the scene quickly, this has been denied or ignored. Mary will give you more information on this later.

In response to the criticism, officers from other London Boroughs have been drafted in under the Gold Command programme run by COBRA and the Cabinet Office. This brings together the Emergency Services and local authorities and sets priorities and manages blockages. It meets once or twice a day and uses conference calls with ministers.

The Red Cross, doctors, grief counsellors and housing specialists are present and have been operating from the Westway Sports Centre. We are also operating our own Gold Group which can link up a range of specialist services to feed into the London Gold Command.

There has been a vast outpouring of donations of clothing, toiletries, bedding and other material from around the country. Collecting, sorting, storing and distributing these has been an enormous logistical challenge.

The Council has worked closely with voluntary organisations charities and faith groups in N Ken for more than 40 years. We fund many of them through our grants programme and they support a range of specialist needs. They have been agents of the Council and in normal times work effectively with us. However, co-ordinating them has proved challenging in these unique circumstances.

Managing our communications has proved impossible in an age of 24 hour news and social media. Normal bids for appearances have broken down and there has been a scrum.

Inaccurate and malicious stories abound. Yesterday I tried to counter some of these with a round of interviews at the BBC. I cannot answer all the questions they have. I suspect no one can but I thought I should try to correct at least some of the misleading statements being made about us.

This has been an almost impossible situation to lead or to grip. Everyone is involved in it from the Prime Minister downwards.

I am trying to protect the integrity and reputation of the Borough at a time when the only thing on the agenda is to trash it. We embody the divide between wealth and poverty and our sustained investment in public services is ignored, belittled or misrepresented. The constant accusation is that we are seeking to socially cleanse the Borough.

Our new MP is not helping to correct this misapprehension.

The next few months, and possibly years, will be extremely challenging. There will be a public enquiry into the fire and why it spread so quickly and in to the specification for the renovation of the Tower. There will be harrowing inquests into the victims. There will be a barrage of media interest and relentless political focus on all aspects of Kensington & Chelsea.

This morning I met the Cabinet. I offered my resignation. It was unanimously rejected and I was urged to continue to do my best. I have called this meeting tonight because I think it is right that I should also offer my resignation to you. If you wish me to go I will quite understand. If you wish me to continue for the foreseeable future, I must have your support.

I now propose to leave the room to allow you to discuss this. I would ask you to vote at the end.