

# **STATEMENT TO CABINET 29 JUNE 2017 GRENFELL TOWER FIRE**

## **CLLR NICHOLAS PAGET-BROWN**

We meet in the tragic aftermath of the worst incident to have occurred in the Borough since Kensington and Chelsea was created 52 years ago and one of London's worst single losses of life since the second world war. As the questions rage around, I want to start by remembering that it is the 80 people confirmed so far who have lost their lives and their grief stricken families that are uppermost in our minds. They certainly have been in mine. We also know that the top of the building has not been reached yet and that a number of people are still unaccounted for having been reported missing.

It is still almost impossible to take in the events which led to their final moments in the early hours of that summer morning.

In this statement I want to address the following:

- Fire Safety
- Housing Assessment and Allocation
- Support for individuals and families
- Other partners who have offered assistance
- Changes to the way the Council operates in response to the fire.

### **FIRE SAFETY**

The cause of the fire and the reasons it spread so rapidly will lie at the heart of the public enquiry and it would not be right to pre-empt that.

KCTMO manage 18 tower blocks which are over 10 stories in the borough – all have up-to-date Fire Safety Risk Assessments and none of the other high-rise blocks in the Borough have cladding. This has been confirmed to DCLG as part of their survey into tower blocks and external fixtures

I can however confirm that a letter about fire safety has been delivered by hand to all residents in high-rise blocks by the Tenant

Management Organisation. It re-iterates advice given by the Fire Service.

The TMO has also commissioned an independent fire survey of the Council's blocks of flats and the results of this will be made publicly available.

## **HOUSING**

I wanted to update the Cabinet on where we are now in terms of supporting those who lost their homes or needed to move out of nearby properties for safety. I realise the Council has come in for much criticism for its response. I will acknowledge this and apologise for what we could have done better.

373 households are currently in temporary accommodation. That includes 140 placements of people from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk. Nobody has been offered accommodation outside London. Residents have been told that they can stay in a hotel until a more suitable housing option can be identified. There is a target of re-housing everyone currently in a hotel within three weeks to more suitable interim accommodation whilst their long-term housing requirements are met.

Everyone who lost their home is undergoing a Housing Assessment to identify their longer-term needs. So far 153 have been completed. 65 have been offered temporary accommodation. Our Housing Allocations team is searching for appropriate properties nearby. 68 new build flats have been identified in the Warwick Road development to which RBKC will have the nominations. We have also had discussions with Clarion who have offered several flats in their Chelsea site for short-term accommodation. Other offers have been made of interim housing and are currently being assessed.

## **SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES**

A social worker has been allocated to every affected household that wants one both from the Tower and other neighbouring properties. On

the ground, 106 of the 160 Adult Social Care and Childrens' Social Services Team have been RBKC staff.

The Housing Assessment Team has been staffed by officers from other boroughs but the allocations team is from RBKC.

Kensington Aldridge Academy will remain closed until September and pupils in Year 7-9 are currently based at Burlington Danes. The sixth form is at Latymer Upper School. Further tests are being made of the cladding. St Francis of Assisi school is operating from the Sion Manning site. Counselling is being provided to both teachers and pupils and our educational psychologists are providing in-depth support across the Borough.

The Red Cross and HMRC have been providing support to people without papers to help them with basic identification. Some residents have been concerned that there will be difficulties with their immigration status despite the undertakings given by the Prime Minister. I have written to the Home Secretary to urge her to ensure that Home Office staff are aware of this and that displaced residents are not deterred from seeking help.

Families have received immediate financial support. As of yesterday more than £1.6m had been distributed to affected families. This consists of a £500 cash payment for immediate needs and £5000 delivered through the DWP into a bank account. I recognise that in the early days there were issues in ensuring that all those who needed cash had received it

A family assistance centre providing support to those dealing with bereavement has been opened and offers a wide range of support services including interpreters.

### **OTHER PARTNERS OFFERING ASSISTANCE**

It is clear that the scale and complexity of this tragedy required help from beyond this Borough. I am extremely grateful to all the other Boroughs who have offered assistance. Also to more than 10,000

people who have volunteered help. We have responded to them all and asked them to complete a questionnaire setting out the area where they are best able to offer help. The Volunteer Centre will take on the role of co-ordinating this activity.

We have also received a huge number of donations of both food, goods and money. The Red Cross are assisting with this and some of the goods will be sold to raise money. The Red Cross along with the Kensington & Chelsea Foundation will deliver funds to community groups.

We have also been extremely fortunate in the sustained support given by so many of the community groups and voluntary organisations based in North Kensington from the very first hours of the fire. Council staff were present at many of them, but clearly not visible enough. As responsibility for the operation of the Grenfell Support Group passes back to the Borough over the next week or so, we will be looking to the community to indicate what else is required and they will take an active role in deciding how the donations are handled.

### **COUNCIL: THE WAY FORWARD**

I recognise that there has been political fall-out from the Grenfell Fire and that there may yet be more. We have lost our Town Clerk, Nicholas Holgate and I want to reinforce my thanks to him for the great service that he has given to Kensington & Chelsea over his 8 years with us. I am very grateful to Dr Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of Lewisham for agreeing to act as an interim Chief Executive and grateful to Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham for agreeing to lend him to us. We will hear from Dr Quirk shortly.

I also want to acknowledge the huge amount of work undertaken by officers on the ground who have stepped up to deal with this tragedy. Many have volunteered long hours and weekends to ensure that we are able to ensure that a range of services and the benefits of local knowledge and contacts can be brought into play in the service of residents.

The Council will need to think about how we continue to recognise the immensity of this tragedy. It cannot be business as usual. In the next few days I will announce a sub-committee of the Cabinet to oversee the specific challenges posed by the fire and to ensure that we have a co-ordinated and visible response that is respected by the survivors.

I think we will also need a dedicated Scrutiny Committee to oversee this work and to ensure that community representatives are properly heard. I will discuss this with the other parties.

Our officer team will need to consider how it is best configured to respond and this is likely to involve staff dedicated to a specific Grenfell Tower unit.

The other work of the Council needs to continue. Many residents depend on our social care programmes, child support, waste, parks, transport, planning and library services. It is important that this work carries on and meets the highest standards expected by our residents.

At present the name of Kensington & Chelsea stands tarnished and diminished. Our plans to transform housing are currently on hold. Our reputation with the wider community in North Kensington is damaged and in some cases fractured. Our tenants and leaseholders have questions for us and the TMO. We are under sustained media criticism for a slow reaction to the Fire, non-visibility and for failing to invest in North Kensington. I believe that many of these criticisms need to be challenged and over time they will be, but I can think of nothing more demeaning to the memory of those lost and missing in the fire than seeking the resolution of political scores.

This is a huge event in the contemporary history of London. The horror to befall Grenfell Tower has been seen around the world. The challenge now is to ensure that the strengths which also characterise this place, and North Kensington in particular, are seen to play their part in bringing the community together and ensuring that one of the

most diverse parts of a great City can start to move forward from this tragedy.

I will invite Dr Quirk to speak and then take questions

## **Answers to Questions**

### **The Fire**

Let me explain what happened once the fire was discovered.

The Council's Contingency Planning Manager was contacted by Borough's on call duty manager at 2.21. Housing managers and the TMO were informed shortly afterwards. I was notified just before 3 a.m. and went to the scene directly. Other Councillors were present. By 5.30 the Borough's Emergency Control Centre was opened at Kensington Town Hall by 5.30. Members of the Council's Housing Department arrived here from 5.30 and began contacting hotels and housing associations.

The first rest centre was opened at the Bellusuis Hotel in Shepherd's Bush Green and then the Harrow Club. *(Check with Mr Holgate were these Council?)*. Faith and community groups also spontaneously opened other emergency centres at Rugby Portobello, Clement James and Latimer Christian Centre. The Council despatched housing officers to Rugby Portobello and Clement James. They were able to distribute immediate funds of £500 to each household for essentials. A further emergency centre opened at Westway Sports Centre which became the main focal point of the Council's response as it was able to accommodate emergency overnight accommodation. The housing officers relocated to Westway. By Monday following the fire, more

than 100 families were in receipt of a social worker who could co-ordinate their needs.

Meanwhile, neighbouring buildings were evacuated and residents directed to the emergency centres.

The CCG despatched doctors and other health professionals on Wednesday morning to the three centres.

The Adult Social Care emergency planning officer arranged for social workers to attend the three emergency centres.

Childrens Social Services also provided a response and began visits to families placed in hotels. Some went to St Mary's hospital to support injured or bereaved children. There was also liaison with St Francis of Assissi Primary School and Kensington Aldridge Academy.

Our Town Clerk held 2 Gold meetings on Wednesday 14 June. One at 11 and one at 3. That evening he discussed the situation with London –wide representatives and accepted the offer of an additional 3 senior staff to attend the Gold Meeting on Thursday. Two senior officers from Southwark attended the Gold meeting as they had experience of the response to the tragic fire at Lakanal House. On Thursday evening the London Local Authority Gold command structure was invoked. On Friday there were two Gold Meetings. The afternoon one involved a COBRA conversation with ministers it was interrupted by protests at the Town Hall and relocated to Westminster. Help from other Boroughs was now invoked.

By Thursday, other urgent tasks were emerging. These included handling a huge volume of donations being delivered to emergency centres and the Town Hall.

