

**GRENFELL TOWER  
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

---

**Witness Statement of**

**JONATHAN EDWARD MORCOM**

---

**I, JONATHAN EDWARD MORCOM, EMPLOYED WITH RBKC, WILL SAY AS  
FOLLOWS:**

1. I make this Witness Statement further to receipt of the Rule 9 letter from the Public Inquiry dated 12 July 2018 and to provide assistance to the Public Inquiry.
2. The matters contained in this statement are either known to me or are ones which I believe (in which case I have specifically said so) or are derived from records including computer records maintained by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea ('the Borough' or 'the Council'), and to which I have access and with which I am familiar and which I believe to be accurate.
3. I attach to my Witness Statement an Index of the Exhibits to which I refer in the following paragraphs of my statement.
4. I confirm that I have not been interviewed by the police in relation to the fire at Grenfell Tower.
5. At the outset I would like to extend my sincerest sympathies to those who were bereaved, injured or displaced from their homes as a result of the Grenfell tragedy. I hope that the

information provided within my statement contributes in some way to getting a clearer picture of the circumstances that led to the incredibly upsetting events of June 2017.

**My role within the Borough: housing complaints**

6. My full name is Jonathan Edward Morcom but I am known at work as 'Jon', and this is the name given on the email account I use at the Council.
7. I am the Lead Officer for Housing Complaints and Enquiries at the Borough and have held this position since 2003. I have worked at the Borough in a variety of roles for 30 years, most of them within the Housing Department.
8. I left school with the Australian equivalent of 'O' levels, my Year 5 Leaving Certificate. After several years' employment in Australia I moved to the UK and worked for six months at the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. I then moved to the Borough in April 1988 where I have worked ever since. I began with a role in the Rent Accounts Department and later moved to Temporary Accommodation. After this I did a stint in the Strategic Development Team and then worked in Housing Initiatives, dealing largely with Housing Associations. My role evolved into its current incarnation in about 2003 although I had been dealing with complaints prior to that time, particularly from housing association tenants due to my role in Housing Initiatives.
9. I was the sole officer administering complaints and enquiries relating to the three teams which sat within the Housing Department prior to the fire: (i) 'Housing Commissioning', (ii) 'Strategy and Regeneration' and (iii) 'Housing Needs'. All three of these teams answered to the Director of Housing: in June 2017 this was Laura Johnson. However, for administrative purposes my role sat within Housing Commissioning and I reported directly to the head of that team, Amanda Johnson.
10. Housing Commissioning included a number of different functions which were based around the procurement and monitoring of additional accommodation used by the Council. In particular the team worked on supported housing (i.e. suitable for persons with housing needs such as young persons and other vulnerable persons who need

support in their day-to-day living), and temporary accommodation (used to accommodate persons to whom the Borough owed statutory homelessness duties). Prior to the fire, the Housing Commissioning Team also included a General Needs Housing Commissioning Manager, Celia Caliskan, who worked more closely with the TMO.

11. Following a recent reorganisation of what was the 'Housing Department', it has recently been renamed 'Housing Needs and Supply'. My role now sits within Housing Needs and my line manager is now Rob Shaw. I am still the sole complaints officer in the Department.
12. In administrative terms we now sit alongside 'Housing Management Services' which accommodates the functions formerly carried out by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ('the TMO') which were transferred back to the Council in March 2018. 'Housing Management Services' has its own complaints team. This is because the TMO always had its own separate complaints team, using its own internal complaints procedure, which dealt with any issues arising from their management of the Council's housing stock. This structure has essentially remained in place following the transfer of functions back to the Borough.
13. Prior to the fire, the TMO had a team of three working on complaints: Catherine Dack, (who was my main point of contact and I believe was head of the team), Dulce De Oliveira and Ewa Sobczak. On a very small number of occasions I also dealt with Stuart Hill, who I believe was senior to Ms Dack.
14. Another change since the fire is that a separate Grenfell complaints and inquiries team has now been set up. However, I am not generally involved with that team or its work, other than sometimes giving them a steer on a query.
15. I would describe my role as registering and then acting as a filter for all enquiries and complaints about the Housing Department (as I will call it in this statement).
16. By 'filtering' complaints and enquiries, I mean that I log whatever communications are received onto our database, which is called 'Respond'. I then review each item and decide who is best placed to reply: usually this is the officer or team who previously dealt with



the matter. I send it to the relevant team(s) with a due date by which they need to reply. When responses are received I then administer and coordinate the response: I decide if more information is required from the officer or team, review the letter in terms of grammar and the language used, and generally get it into a condition in which I feel senior officers would be happy to review and sign off.

17. The reality of the position is that I am not the person who carries out the investigation or makes the decision whether or not to uphold the complaint. My role is really to coordinate and administer the process, and to help officers pull together their reply. The final decision is made by the senior officer who reviews and signs off the response.
18. For the past several years I have also assisted with Freedom of Information ('FOI') requests and Subject Access Requests. The Council had a central officer for these requests, Robin Yu, who would record and monitor all requests centrally. If a request was related to the Housing Department's work, Robin would forward it to me. I would then carry out much the same role as for complaints: log it on our system, allocate it to an officer who could pull together the required data or would be able to flag if one of the statutory exceptions might apply, and act as a 'middle man' feeding this back to Robin.

### **Communications with Residents**

#### *Systems for residents to express views and concerns regarding fire safety*

19. I am not aware of any specific complaints procedure or discussion forum in the Council which was solely concerned with fire safety, or with health and safety for residents. However, in principle the Council's 3-stage complaints process could be used by residents who wanted to raise issues which were relevant to the Housing Department. I also believe that residents could file complaints with the TMO where the substance related to its housing management functions (although I do not know much about the TMO's complaints procedure).



25. Procedurally, there is a distinction between members' enquiries and complaints to the extent that there is a 5-day turnaround target for enquiries and a target of 15 working days for complaints at each stage. Generally, the nature of a members' enquiry means they are quicker to turn around. Unfortunately there are a lot of people in the chain, all with demands on their time, so the response date sometimes slips.
26. If there was overlap between a members' enquiry and a complaint, the Council would inform the MP or councillor that it was responding under the formal complaints process and undertake to send the member a copy of the response. Prior to the fire, we endeavoured to record all members' enquiries and to make sure they were sent a response, although I am willing to accept there may have been cases where follow up was inadvertently overlooked.
27. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with as I have described in relation to my role above. Responses are reviewed and signed off by the level of officer below Director, i.e. the Head of Housing Needs, Strategy and Regeneration or Housing Commissioning, depending on which team had been most closely involved in the substance of the complaint. Before the fire this was Amanda Gill, Amanda Johnson and Ruth Angel. However as a large majority of complaints related to matters dealt with by the Housing Needs Department, Amanda Gill had to deal with most of the cases.
28. In practical terms, the process means that a Stage 1 response has usually been through three or more pairs of hands and would have been reviewed a number of times before the complainant received the formal response. The response might include input and information from several different officers or teams depending on the nature of the complaint or enquiry.
29. Complainants unsatisfied with the Stage 1 response can escalate the matter to Stage 2. These were ultimately reviewed and signed off by the Director of Housing. I would play a similar role as I did at Stage 1: going back and asking the team for any further information or comments, ensuring a draft was prepared, reviewing the responses and sending a draft to the Director.



30. There is a further right to escalate complaints to Stage 3. These complaints were previously reviewed by the Council's Chief Executive, Nicholas Holgate. Since the fire this role has been reallocated to Robyn Fairman, Executive Director for the Grenfell Team (which is a new position).
31. The final Stage 1, 2 or 3 responses are sent off to the complainant and to any members involved in the case, then I attach a copy on 'Respond'. I also make sure whoever drafted the response receives a copy of the final response so it can be stored on that team's system, and so the relevant officer sees it and can learn from any changes that may have been made to their original draft.
32. At each of the three stages, complainants can provide as much information and input as they wish. At Stages 2 or 3 they are usually expressly invited to make further comments in response to the earlier decisions. Complainants occasionally ask for a meeting to discuss the complaint and this can be facilitated if it would be helpful to try and identify a solution for that person, but this would usually need to be with the officers involved in the assessment or actioning of their case, rather than with me, although I do meet with complainants on occasion.
33. The Council does not refuse to accept complaints with two exceptions. One is when a complaint has already been investigated and there has been no change in circumstances which would merit a second investigation. The other is when there is another mechanism which might be more useful for the complainant. This often comes up in temporary accommodation and homelessness cases, where there are statutory rights of review under the Housing Act 1996: I might steer these complaints towards the Review Team to be dealt with under the statutory process.
34. If complaints are upheld, the Council has various remedial actions it can take; these include issuing an apology, offering to reconsider its previous decisions, or noting a service failure but finding that the outcome would have been the same in any event. It is possible to pay compensation as a matter of discretion, but this is exercised only in exceptional cases.

35. If the complainant remains unsatisfied following Stage 3, they can refer the complaint to the relevant ombudsman. Historically the TMO was answerable to the Housing Ombudsman, which deals with tenants and leaseholders who live in social housing and which could consider aspects of housing management such as disrepair.
36. The Borough is answerable to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman ('LGSCO'). In this context, that meant the LGSCO could examine the functions of the Housing Department but not those of the TMO. In my role I have only ever dealt with the LGSCO. I don't recall any cases in which there was confusion about which ombudsman should accept a particular complaint, or difficulties ensuring that complainants could get a response as a result of this division in their respective areas of scrutiny.
37. Generally the LGSCO will expect complainants to have already accessed, if not exhausted the Council's internal complaints process before it will agree to investigate. When it accepts a case, the LGSCO writes to the Council informing that it is investigating the matter, sending a copy of the complaint it has received and asking for detailed information and paperwork. The Council is given an opportunity to comment.
38. LGSCO referrals are sent to a central contact point at the Council, who forward the Housing Needs-related cases to me. I then coordinate the response in much the same way as for 'normal' complaints. Ultimately, the Head of the relevant team signs off on a memo and the appended relevant documents, which are sent to the LGSCO so that it can make its decision, or request further clarification if needed.
39. The LGSCO upholds a small number of complaints against the Borough annually, but it usually dismisses or chooses not to investigate a larger numbers of complaints. For example in 2017-18 it upheld three complaints out of a total of 18 which it investigated (JM/1: , p. 9).
40. When the LGSCO upholds a case, it makes recommendations to the Council as to how it can put the matter right for the complainant. The Ombudsman does not have any powers to force local authorities to comply. However, the Borough's general policy is that if the LGSCO finds there have been failings, then it will comply with the recommendations.



This sometimes includes payment of compensation (which tends to be small nominal amounts, such as a few hundred pounds), but it also recommends other solutions. I can recall one recent case in which we had to offer the complainant the next four-bedroom property which became available for allocation.

41. Each year I create an Annual Report which provides a summary of the activities across all complaints, members' enquiries, FOI and Subject Access Requests in the Housing Department. It is essentially a synopsis of the year recorded on the 'Respond' database. The Annual Report gives statistics about what happened in the year, with an appendix of anecdotal evidence of all complaints (but not members' enquiries, as these are numerous). I prepare it as soon as I can in April each year.
42. By way of illustration I attach the Annual Report 2017-18 as (JM/2:                      ).
43. The Annual Report is sent to the Director and all team managers in housing. It is a lesson learning exercise, used to identify trends in complaints, where there are shortfalls in service provision and training needs.
44. The number of formal complaints received by the Council runs at about 80 to 100 per year. In 2017-18, 74 formal complaints and 180 members' enquiries were logged (JM/3:                      , pp. 4 and 11). These numbers would be fairly normal in an 'ordinary' year, but I believe last year these were under-reported due to the exceptional volume of correspondence and urgent requests for information which Housing Needs received after the fire. Many of these requests were responded to urgently and directly by managers or myself, so they were probably not all recorded formally on 'Respond'.
45. Complaints and enquiries cover both practical issues and the Council's housing needs service. The majority of communications relate to provision of temporary accommodation, i.e. decisions on where the accommodation offered is located and its condition of repair. Probably 40-50% of all annual complaints and enquiries arise from this area. The location of temporary accommodation is particularly contentious, as we do not have enough affordable accommodation within the Borough to house everyone who applies.

46. In terms of complaints coming in about health and safety, I can recall some cases in which managing agents (who manage all temporary accommodation properties) have been criticised for delays responding to repairs issues in temporary accommodation. However, I cannot recall personally dealing with cases via Stages 1-3 or the LGSCO which involved fire safety issues. I can't say there was never an issue touching on fire safety in a complaint in the 15 years I have been in this role. However, I do not recall detailed or repeated complaints about these issues coming through the system; these are more likely to have been submitted directly to the TMO. I discuss specific complaints about the works at Grenfell Tower below.

#### *Systems for recording and addressing complaints*

47. Since 2008 we have recorded members' enquiries and complaints on 'Respond', a bespoke database which has been in use since then. It had a version upgrade in 2017 but fundamentally remains the same system that was implemented in 2008. All cases are entered chronologically, so Respond should contain all complaints which were formally logged dating back to 2008.
48. This system was not specifically designed or intended to be used for the question of complaints about fire safety. It is used to record all complaints which go through the Stage 1-3 or LGSCO processes.
49. When complaints come into the team they are logged onto Respond, which is essentially mine to use alone. It is solely for the recording of complaints and enquiries: all it does is store information. I also use it to log FOI requests and enquiries from the LGSCO. I do record Subject Access Requests but they go on a separate spreadsheet. Documents, attachments and emails related to complaints or enquiries are added manually to Respond through an add-in tool that interfaces with Outlook. I choose not to add what I consider 'low level' traffic, e.g. emails sent to officers with reminders of the due dates. However, I try to attach everything of relevance, especially all correspondence with the complainant. It is in my interests to keep all records of any dealings on a particular matter.

#### *Complaints and enquiries about the TMO*



50. Historically the Borough has received a reasonable number of complaints from tenants about the TMO. These complaints frequently involved alleged failures to deal effectively or efficiently with disrepair: this was probably 4 out of 5 complaints about the TMO which came to us. We would forward these complaints to the TMO to deal with under its own procedures.
51. The position had always been that the TMO was set up in 1996 to manage and maintain the Council's housing stock. It had its own complaints process and the Council's view was that it should have the chance, indeed the obligation, to respond to any issues raised, preferably within its own process. So wherever practicable, we pointed complainants back to that procedure. To the best of my knowledge the TMO also used a multi-stage internal complaints process, but I cannot recall the details as I didn't administer those complaints.
52. The TMO's complaints team (which I described above) dealt with those complaints. I was able to refer complaints directly to them whenever communications sent to us needed to be redirected. The relationship worked the other way too, but I generally had more cause to contact them. When we redirected complaints or enquiries they were not logged on Respond as they were not being formally accepted by our team. We did get members' enquiries which had been misdirected, but this number reduced as members became experienced over time in sending them to the right place. My priority was to get the TMO to contact the person so that they knew their complaint was being dealt with.
53. It was not my role to follow up and monitor the TMO's responses to the complaints it received generally, or to those which I forwarded to them. It simply did not form part of my duties. The exception would be if the TMO had to provide information that would be incorporated into a response going from the Council.
54. Sometimes there were members' enquiry cases which we dealt with through Housing's systems but required the TMO's input in order to respond. A recurring scenario is in cases where the surviving child of a deceased TMO tenant wants the TMO/Borough to grant them succession to that tenancy so they can stay on living in the property. In most cases this cannot happen if the recently deceased tenant had already succeeded the



tenancy from their spouse at the point they died. In order to provide a fully informed reply, Housing Needs might require information held by the TMO as its managing agent.

55. The TMO also manage a small number of the Council's hostels used for housing single homeless persons, so complaints about temporary accommodation there sometimes also required information from the TMO.
56. There were other cases in which residents were frustrated with the TMO and they would contact the Council in the hope that the Council could change or influence the outcome of the TMO's actions. In considering complaints of this nature I would ask whether they had already put a formal complaint through the TMO's process. Where they had not done so, I would redirect or signpost them to the complaints team at the TMO to be dealt with there.
57. There was no mechanism or procedure by which, if a resident was unhappy with the final outcome of the TMO's internal complaints process, they had a right to 'escalate' the complaint to the Council or have it considered a second time through the Council's three-stage process. Instead the avenue for those residents was to take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. However, in practical terms this did not preclude the possibility that they would write to senior managers such as Laura Johnson, the Cabinet Member for Housing or the Council Leader.
58. On a very exceptional basis, the Council would put a complaint about the TMO through its internal process notwithstanding that the substance of the complaints fell outside our usual remit. I think this may sometimes have happened in cases where the resident had already received a response from the TMO but was unhappy with it and continued to pursue their complaint with senior managers.
59. The main occasion on which I can recall this taking place was in early 2017 when a leaseholder was unhappy with the contractors the TMO were using on a schedule of works, and then about how the TMO was managed by the Council. His specific complaint was that the Council didn't have a performance indicator for complaints about the TMO. We treated this as a complaint about the Council's stewardship of the TMO, and therefore thought it was appropriate to put it through the Council's three-stage complaints process.

The thinking was that this might provide a more satisfactory response for the resident, particularly because if he remained unhappy with the Council's response he could escalate things to the LGSCO. I recall that this complaint did not concern the works at Grenfell Tower.

60. I attach the Stages 1, 2 and 3 responses sent to this leaseholder: (JM/2:                   ), (JM/3:                   ), (JM/4:                   ).
61. There was also another resident who was unhappy with the way the Lancaster West Estate Management Board was elected. The Borough responded through the complaints procedure. This was so that the complaint could be fully aired and dealt with in substance.
62. I attach the Stage 1 and 2 response letters sent to this resident: (JM/5:                   ), (JM/6:                   ).
63. I think when the decision was made to do this, it was based on a joint discussion between myself, Laura Johnson and Amanda Johnson about the best way to explore or resolve the complaint going forward. I don't know whether this decision was taken in conjunction with the TMO, but I believe that the TMO (in particular Robert Black) would most likely have been aware of these complaints. However, I did not personally get involved in investigating those complaints. This took place at a higher level than me because of the exceptional nature of these two cases. That said, I may have had a hand in tidying up the draft responses.

#### *Complaints about fire safety and Grenfell Tower*

64. I was aware of emails submitted by various groups of residents to the senior managers at the Borough and the TMO about works in progress at Grenfell Tower and their concerns about various matters. However, I did not administer these complaints, I was never asked to draft a response, and they were dealt with above my level. In reality, they were not processed using the usual procedure described above because they were always addressed to members and/or senior management and were seemingly dealt with at those higher levels.



65. I was copied into a number of the emails about these complaints, principally by Laura Johnson and Amanda Johnson. However, this happened with the expectation that I would retain a record of the documents for the files. I believe that I was asked to do this because of my overarching role in dealing with and coordinating members' enquiries and complaints. I also believe they thought it would be useful if I was aware of the complaints in case they came back in again, in another form or via another channel. Sometimes I was only copied in at a late stage, when the formal response had already been formulated by senior managers at the Council or TMO.
66. The parties raising concerns about fire safety and the works at Grenfell Tower tended to do so at a higher level. These concerns were sometimes raised by Councillors on behalf of residents' groups, or else the residents' groups themselves sent their complaints directly to high-level officers such as the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Director of Housing or Robert Black, Chief Executive of the TMO. Sometimes ward members or MPs then subsequently indicated they were interested in the outcome of the complaints.
67. These types of complaints were not logged onto Respond. The reality was that these were TMO complaints which fell to be dealt with under their procedures, notwithstanding that they had been addressed to senior council officers who, as a result, assisted in commenting on the responses. The TMO then took responsibility for processing these complaints through their 3-Stage process, or by drafting responses either in close co-operation or on behalf of senior managers. Any follow up actions arising from the complaint were also likely to have to be actioned by the TMO rather than Housing Department. Given the direct involvement of senior managers, it was not my decision as to whether or not the complaints were handled by the TMO or Council. Had the complaints been entered into Respond, it might have changed the annual statistics in the Council's Annual Report to some limited extent, but otherwise I don't think it would have had any impact. The key point is that the complaints were squarely within the sights of senior managers and were being dealt with on a higher level: they did not need to be 'case managed' by our usual day-to-day procedure, which for the most part centred around Housing Needs issues.
68. Instead of logging the complaints on Respond, I saved the emails in an outlook folder on my email account. However, I note that many of them also appear in a team folder held



in a shared drive. These petitions and letters from residents were not addressed to me and were not allocated for me to deal with.

69. I exhibit a few of the emails with residents' complaints into which I was copied. This is not exhaustive but it gives examples of what I saw and how they were dealt with.
70. On 10 October 2016 I was copied into an email exchange by Laura Johnson. The email concerned the response to a complaint sent by residents to Councillor Judith Blakeman on 29 September 2016. The email chain shows that the response was drafted by Peter Maddison but Ms Johnson said that she would send the response to Councillor Blakeman (JM/7: RBK00000143). I don't recall seeing an email or letter actually sent out by Ms Johnson. It is also not clear to me whether this response was being treated as a formal Stage 1 response to the residents' complaints.
71. I was later copied into some correspondence regarding a complaint submitted by Lee Chapman and Tunde Awoderu on 21 April 2017 (JM/8: RBK00000171). A subsequent email from Sacha Jevans to Laura Johnson dated 5 May 2017 shows that the TMO formulated the response to this complaint, but it also clearly indicates that the matter was being treated as a Stage 1 response (JM/9: RBK00000173).
72. The residents replied to that response with further comments so I assume it moved on to a Stage 2 review, though I cannot recall whether I ever saw a further reply. An email exchange with Victoria Borwick MP showed that the TMO rather than Council was going to reply with a briefing for the MP (JM/10: RBK00000178).
73. These emails illustrate why I felt these complaints were being handled by the TMO rather than the Council. It is likely that the Council and TMO worked together drafting these responses to high-level concerns, but the matters being dealt with were not really within the bounds of the 'normal' complaints process that I dealt with on a day-to-day level.

### **Statement of Truth**


I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Full name: Jonathan Edward Morcom

Position or office held: Lead Officer for Housing Complaints and Enquiries,  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Signed:



Date: 27 September 2018

**GRENFELL TOWER  
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

---

**Index to  
Witness Statement of  
JONATHAN EDWARD MORCOM**

---

<b>JM/</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Inquiry URN</b>	<b>FORT No.</b>
<b>1</b>	Housing Department – Complaints Annual Report 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018	July 2018		FORT02870600
<b>2</b>	Stage 1 response letter regarding complaint of Council oversight of TMO complaints handling	08.03.17		FORT00238816
<b>3</b>	Stage 2 response letter regarding complaint of Council oversight of TMO complaints handling	20.03.17		FORT02870599
<b>4</b>	Stage 3 response letter regarding complaint of Council oversight of	24.04.17		FORT02870597



	TMO complaints handling			
5	Stage 1 response letter regarding complaint on Lancaster West Estate Management Board	29.04.10		FORT02870598
6	Stage 2 response letter regarding complaint on Lancaster West Estate Management Board	14.06.10		FORT02870601
7	Email from Laura Johnson to Amanda Johnson and Peter Maddison	10.10.16	RBK00000143	FORT01934387
8	Email exchange GLTA, John Sweeney and Laura Johnson	24.04.17	RBK00000171	FORT01979319
9	Email exchange TMO Complaints Team, Sacha Jevans and Laura Johnson	05.05.17	RBK00000173	FORT01970182
10	Email exchange GLTA, Victoria Borwick MP and Laura Johnson	24.05.17	RBK00000178	FORT01926723