

**GRENFELL TOWER  
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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**Witness Statement of  
Nicholas Paget-Brown**

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**I, Nicholas Paget-Brown, formerly the leader of THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA, WILL SAY:**

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 to be true, (in which case I have specifically said so), or which are derived from records, including computer records maintained by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea ('the Borough', 'the Council' or 'RBKC'). Any records to which I have referred, I have had access to, and I believe them to be accurate.
3. I attach to my Witness Statement an Index of the Exhibits to which I refer in my statement.
4. I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.
5. I can confirm that I have not been interviewed by, nor given a statement to, the Metropolitan Police Service regarding the events leading up to the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017.

6. The events of 14 June 2017 were unparalleled in London since the end of the Second World War. I was, and remain, devastated by the loss of life and the pain caused to so many families who lost relatives, friends and everything that was dear to them. North Kensington is a wonderful place, but for some, will forever be associated with their recollection of that terrible night. I offer my deepest condolences to everyone who has lost family members or friends and my thoughts and sympathies to those who have survived – often with nothing but terrible memories.

*My background*

7. I graduated from York University in 1979 having studied History and Politics. I began working for a start-up company in the City of London that was developing a pre-cursor for the Internet; a research platform which searched newspapers, journals and trade press. My job was to sell it to financial institutions in the City. The company was later acquired by Reuters. I was travelling internationally and selling the product for Reuters thereafter for approximately 6 years.
8. In 1991 I was recruited by Knight-Ridder Information, the leading US data provider at the time, to set up their London office.
9. In 1995, I set up my own business publishing a newsletter on Environment and Energy Policy. This was targeted at senior managers in UK companies to brief them on forthcoming policy changes that would affect their business. This also gave me more control over my own diary at a time when my interests in local government were developing and taking up more time.
10. I was elected as a Councillor in 1986, for the Hans Town Ward (at the time) in Chelsea. It is now known as the Brompton and Hans Town Ward as extensive ward boundary changes took effect from 2014.

11. My involvement in local politics can be summarised as follows:

- a. In 1986 following my initial election, I was appointed to the Private Sector Housing Committee. This had oversight of private rented housing, tenants' issues, bad landlords and houses in multiple occupation.
- b. In 1988 I was appointed Chairman of the Public Sector Housing Committee, responsible for the management of the Council's housing stock which at that time was the direct responsibility of the Council's housing department. In this capacity I also chaired the Tenants Consultative Committee.
- c. In the early 1990's there was a major re-structuring of Council Committees. Housing and Social Services were merged and I was appointed vice-chair of the new Committee where I continued to have responsibility for housing matters.
- d. I served as Deputy Mayor in 1993 – 1994.
- e. Subsequently I was asked to chair the Environment Committee responsible for waste management, parks, street cleansing, street markets, air quality and associated matters.
- f. Legislative changes<sup>1</sup> introduced a Cabinet (Executive) system for local authorities and in 2000 I became the Borough's Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Community Safety and the Voluntary Sector. I was also appointed as Chief Whip to the Conservative Group.
- g. In 2006, I was appointed as Cabinet Member for Environment and the Arts. In 2009, Transport was added to my portfolio. This created a large area of responsibility including waste, street cleansing, markets, carbon reduction, highway maintenance and road safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Act 2000

h. I became Deputy Leader of RBKC in 2011. I continued with my Cabinet portfolio but ceased to be Chief Whip.

i. In May 2013, I was elected Leader of RBKC.

#### *RBKC Structure and Governance*

12. The structure and governance of RBKC was (and continues to be) governed by its Constitution. For clarity, the comments I make relate to the period of my Leadership and are therefore referred to in the past tense. I understand that since my resignation on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017, the Constitution has been reviewed and revised. I am not familiar with the content of any revised version, and therefore to prevent any confusion, I refer only to the version of the Constitution which is attached (Exhibits NPB/1a – 1h).
13. Part 7, Appendix B (Exh NPB/1h) contained a diagram which set out RBKC's Member-level governance arrangements as at May 2015, which I believe remained in this format until my resignation.
14. The Constitution set out "*how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that they are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people..... Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose*". (Article 1.02, Exh NPB/1c).
15. The Full Council was governed by Article 4 of the Constitution (Exh NPB/1c), which set out how the 50 elected councillors met together, the role of the full Council and its terms of reference, for example the decisions which had to be made at meetings of the full Council.
16. The Cabinet (governed by Article 7 (NPB/1e) was the political executive of the Council and responsible for agreeing overall policies, budgets and key decisions. Its Members and precise portfolios were decided by the Leader, as outlined by Part 3A, Para 1.2 (Exh NPB/1g).



17. For the majority of my period as Leader, the Cabinet was as follows :
- a. Leader – me ;
  - b. Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Regeneration – Cllr Rock Feilding-Mellen ;
  - c. Chief Whip and Cabinet Member for Environment, Environmental Health and Leisure - Cllr Tim Ahern ;
  - d. Remaining Cabinet Members :
    - i. Cabinet Member for Family and Children's Services – Cllr Elizabeth Campbell ;
    - ii. Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, Transport and Arts – Cllr Tim Coleridge ;
    - iii. Cabinet Member for Education and Libraries – Cllr Emma Will ;
    - iv. Cabinet Member for Civil Society – Cllr Gerard Hargreaves ;
    - v. Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy - Cllr Warwick Lightfoot ;
    - vi. Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health– Cllr Mary Weale ;
    - vii. Cabinet Member for Facilities, Management and Procurement Policy – Cllr Paul Warrick.
18. In May 2017, I re-shuffled the Cabinet to the following positions (and re-defined the scope of some of those positions), which I understand remained in situ until the new Leader appointed a new team, save for any resignations tendered :
- i. Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Transport– Cllr Tim Ahern (whilst remaining Chief Whip) ;
  - ii. Cabinet Member for Finance - Cllr Mary Weale ;
  - iii. Cabinet Member for Families and Children – Cllr Emma Will ;
  - iv. Cabinet Member for Education and Libraries – Cllr Catherine Faulks;
  - v. Cabinet Member for Environment and the Arts – Cllr Tim Coleridge ;
  - vi. Cabinet Member for Civil Society – Cllr Gerard Hargreaves ;
  - vii. Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health – Cllr Warwick Lightfoot ;

viii. Cabinet Member for Facilities, Management and Procurement Policy –  
Cllr Paul Warrick.

19. Cllr Rock Feilding-Mellen remained as Deputy and Cllr for Housing, Property and Regeneration.
20. As Leader, my role was set out in Part 3A, Para 1.7 of the Constitution (Exh NPB/1g). My responsibilities and spanned all portfolios in order to ensure co-ordination and a coherent approach to the Council's decision making.
21. As Leader I was the primary public political face of the Council and held to account by the Cabinet, Full Council, and the Cabinet and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee.
22. Cabinet functions and the way and decisions were made were governed by Article 7 of the Constitution (Exh NPB/1e), and included implementing policy through its Forward Plan and key decisions. This required a Cabinet Member to approve Key Decisions having been advised by professional officers. To do this they would need to receive regular briefings, attend meetings with officers and members of the public and communicate with fellow Councillors.
23. The process of preparing a key decision could take weeks or months. For larger strategic and financial decisions, the Cabinet Member was required to take proposals to the Cabinet for collective decision making. In some circumstances a Cabinet Member could make a key decision without reference to the full Cabinet, but would often raise it to discuss with officers, colleagues and the Leader where it had the potential to be contentious.
24. By the time an issue was placed on a Cabinet agenda, it was likely to be in an advanced state of preparation, enabling Members to consider its impact on the Borough, the financial implications, timetabling and public reaction.

25. It was my practice, prior to any Cabinet meeting, to discuss the proposed agenda with the Town Clerk. Items would also be discussed informally at meetings of the Leaders' Group which would take place a week or so before the Cabinet agenda was circulated. The Leaders' Group was an informal gathering of Members of the Cabinet and senior officers to discuss current issues. It could not take decisions, however a number of matters of concern would subsequently form the basis of reports to the Cabinet. Once the agenda for the Cabinet meeting was agreed, it would be circulated and published, in accordance with Article 7.
26. At any meeting, I would ask the Cabinet Member responsible for each agenda item to introduce the paper. I also asked the relevant officer to add operational information or to highlight other details. Cabinet Members would then ask any relevant questions and would have a wider discussion. A decision was then reached on each agenda item and a minute kept of the decision.
27. Cabinet meetings were held in public with the agenda papers and supporting documents published as "Part A" of the agenda. In line with common practice around the country, commercially sensitive material such as contract pricing and tendering were discussed in the private part of the agenda, to respect commercial confidentiality ("Part B") where it was in the public interest not to disclose that information. Policy principles were never discussed in the private part of the agenda.
28. In addition to these meetings I would meet individual Cabinet Members, with the Town Clerk and Directors from the relevant department, in the early part of each calendar year, in order to discuss general policy issues, strategic challenges, organisational matters and any issues which were likely to arise over the coming year.
29. Full Council meetings were held six times a year. Once a year, the full Council would approve the budget for the next financial year. It also approved and adopted plans and strategies which made up the Council's budgetary and policy framework such as the Local Plan and the Licensing Policy, discussed and approved agreed



changes to the Constitution of the Council and debated items referred to the Council for discussion by the Scrutiny Committees.

30. The Opposition were able to bring items to the Council for debate by proposing motions. In addition, members of the public were able to petition the Council. As Leader I was keen for matters of public concern to be brought to the full Council, for a presentation to be given by the petitioners, with a response from the relevant Cabinet member and for debate amongst members to follow. This allowed for all aspects and points of view of controversial issues to be aired.
31. Throughout June and July in each year of my Leadership, the Town Clerk and I would meet Cabinet Members and their Directors to discuss three-year budgetary proposals. Throughout my time as Leader, local government was under unprecedented pressure to reduce costs year-by year as Revenue Support Grant from central Government to all local authorities was significantly reduced. The Council was therefore thinking hard about how, against this background, it could maintain good quality services to the public.
32. One way RBKC sought to achieve this was to share senior management costs with neighbouring local authorities in the City of Westminster and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. This was known as the 'Tri-Borough initiative' and governed by the provision to enter in to joint arrangements under Article 10.2 (NPB/1f).
33. As Leader I met weekly with the Town Clerk to discuss relevant issues and would also discuss items raised in my "mailbag" or picked up on visits around the Borough. The "mailbag" consisted of any written correspondence, emails or calls to the Leaders' office over the preceding week, and ensured that these were recorded and properly followed up. I regularly asked the Town Clerk to follow up particular points raised with me with the relevant officer and department. Occasionally I would raise matters I had picked up at London-wide meetings of Council Leaders, with the Borough's MPs, at Central London Forward meetings or with Ministers.



34. RBKC also had a number of Scrutiny Committees (as outlined in Article 6 (NPB/1d) which would scrutinise key decisions and projects relevant to the Committees' terms of reference. Each Committee would consider proposed key decisions and would receive regular reports on current projects from Cabinet Members, who would normally be present at the meeting to present their report and to answer questions. All aspects of Council activity were able to be scrutinised by the relevant committee.
35. The Committee did not have the authority to modify a key decision, but could refer it back to the Cabinet for re-consideration. Twice a year I was asked by the Cabinet and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee to answer questions about the general direction of Council policy.
36. In order to address the issues of how to provide additional housing to meet London's growing population and to meet our Manifesto pledge (Exh NPB/2), (outlined further below) to improve housing in the Borough, the Council also established a Development Board, which I chaired. This brought together different parts of the Council to discuss long-term plans for regenerating some of the Council's estates.
37. The intention was to see whether it was financially viable to re-develop some of the post war estates in need of extensive repair and refurbishment to provide more additional homes for every type of tenure. It was the Council's declared policy that all existing tenants and leaseholders affected would return to improved housing near where they had lived. Members of the Board included the Cabinet Members for Housing and Planning, as well as senior officers. Consultants provided the Board with advice on matters including density, potential locations and financial feasibility studies. It met three or four times a year and any proposals it put forward would be referred to the Cabinet for approval.
38. As part of my plan to be more directly accessible to residents, I would hold "Ask Nick" public meetings, three to four times a year. These meetings were open to anyone and would cover most major areas of the Council's responsibilities including planning, infrastructure, social care, community safety, waste collection, public

transport and road safety. Typically, at these meetings residents spoke about their day to day issues, concerns and complaints.

39. An example of how such a forum would work is demonstrated via Exh NPB/3 which is a folder containing background briefings on possible issues which may be raised by residents at a meeting which took place on 20 October 2015<sup>2</sup>.
40. Folders of this nature would be provided to me usually about a week before the meeting, which allowed me to study the contents in order to have a profile of the Ward in which the session was being held and to ensure that I had been briefed on local pertinent issues. It also gave me the opportunity to request further information as required specific to each meeting.
41. In addition to these meetings, I would also hold one "Ask Nick" session annually, specifically for TMO residents.
42. On occasion, more controversial issues were raised, some of which were already the subject of specific public meetings organised by residents. Where this was the case, I and the appropriate Cabinet Members would be asked to attend those public meetings, and it was our usual practice to attend. Examples of such meetings included the proposal to build a Crossrail station in Kings Road, Chelsea (organised by the Chelsea Society), and plans for estate regeneration and how to consult residents at an early stage (organised by West London Citizens).

#### *Aims/Delivery*

43. In the Manifesto for the 2014 (Pledge 6) Council elections, the Conservative Group committed to building more homes for all types of tenure and to investing in the Council's stock of housing. There was concern that we had an insufficient quantity of housing to be able to meet all needs locally.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 44-45 of the scanned version (page 38 – 39 of the paginated document) contains an up-date in relation to the refurbishment works at Grenfell Tower.

44. The intention behind the Manifesto pledge was to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation and also to provide opportunities for younger local people to start to own a home in the Borough. It would also enable us to meet the Mayor's London Plan target for the Borough of an additional 750 (of all tenures) homes a year which RBKC was a long way from meeting. This would be achieved by regenerating some of the Council's own estates where density was low and medium-term maintenance and repair costs were high, rebuilding them to a higher standard and increasing the density towards the levels found in some of the desirable southern neighbourhoods in the Borough. The intention was to build neighbourhoods which included retail and work spaces, as well as homes.

### *Complaints*

45. RBKC's Constitution set out the rights people had in relation to making a complaint about the Council, and the various routes available to them (Art 3.02 – Exh NPB/1b). In addition to this, as Leader, I met every Friday with my office team and would go through the weekly "mailbag", as outlined above.
46. If the matter was of a political nature I would respond myself. If it was a complaint in relation to a particular issue or required a technical response, I would request that it be forwarded to the appropriate department. On occasion, this might be for a draft response which I would sign off and send out in my name.
47. If an item related to the TMO, it would be forwarded to them for their action or, on very rare occasions (perhaps where I had met someone and they had subsequently written to me), for a draft response to be prepared for me to send.
48. In any instance where a resident was unhappy with a Council response, they would be directed to RBKC's formal complaints procedure. This procedure set out the various stages of how any complaint would be dealt with, including signposting them to the Local Government Ombudsman if they were still dissatisfied, as outlined in the Constitution.



49. The monitoring and tracking of correspondence enabled me to assess any patterns and scale of complaints, and whether there appeared to be any systematic failings either within a particular department or on a particular issue. My assessment would vary in direct response to the issue(s) being raised. Where there were systemic failings resulting from a number of similar complaints, I would need to investigate the issue and have a more detailed understanding of the cause. Where an issue was raised in isolation, and was perhaps related to on-going case work, whilst it may require a detailed response, I would not need to investigate the matter beyond requiring the appropriate department to assist.
50. In relation to Grenfell Tower I received correspondence from residents in relation to power surges prior to the refurbishments. These were referred to the TMO and dealt with by the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 July 2013 (Ex NPB/4).
51. In addition to the above, I was aware that a petition had been presented to the Council in December 2015. I was not present at this meeting due to the very recent death of my Father. The petition requested that the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee undertake an urgent review of the TMO's and Rydon's management of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower. The petition was discussed at the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 January 2016 (Ex NPB/5).
52. Based on the above as examples, I had confidence that the Council were dealing with complaints properly and in accordance with the Constitution and complaints procedure.

*Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation*

53. The Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation was formally launched in 1996 by the Rt Hon John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment. This was a few years after I had been Vice Chair of the Housing and Social Service Committee and during my appointment as Chair of the Environment Committee. It is my understanding that the TMO was formed in response to changes



in legislation and a desire by tenants to avoid the Council's housing stock being transferred to a Housing Association, where it was possible that rents would rise more sharply.

54. Following the launch of the KCTMO, RBKC took the decision to transfer all of its housing stock to be managed by them. All aspects of management were ultimately transferred from RBKC to the TMO, which included the procurement process in relation to refurbishment works. I do not know the details of any agreement(s) or the chronology of when specific responsibilities were formally transferred to the TMO.
55. At the roughly the same time as the inception of the TMO, the Lancaster West Estate Management Board ('EMB') was set up for Lancaster West and Grenfell specifically.
56. The EMB did not function effectively with regular reports that board meetings were often inquorate. At some point I understand a decision was made following a recommendation from the Housing Department to dissolve this entity and incorporate its functions back into the TMO. I do not recall much opposition to this, but as it was not within my area of responsibility at the time, I am unable to give further details.
57. Although I was not directly involved with housing issues, I recall that RBKC was concerned at some aspects of the TMO's performance around 2006 – 2010. The issues related to void properties, uncollected service charges payable by leaseholders and problems with timely repairs would be regularly reported to the Cabinet Member for Housing and to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee.
58. Whilst I was Leader, having been aware of previous poor performance of the TMO, but having been advised that performance was now improving, I met the CEO, Robert Black, informally three to four times a year. The issues we discussed were largely driven by correspondence I had received about a range of issues. These would normally include unsatisfactory repairs, anti-social behaviour, leaseholder service charges and inadequate management of cleaning. More strategically, we would, on

occasions, discuss the limited availability of suitable housing for our residents, and in particular the fact that we had too many properties with an insufficient number of bedrooms.

59. He would also raise matters with me and report on various surveys which the TMO had undertaken to measure resident satisfaction on individual estates. The Cabinet member for Housing would meet the TMO more regularly and follow-up on a number of these issues. The TMO Board was responsible for scoping works required and appointing contractors. The Cabinet would receive reports on the TMO's capital budgets as part of the background information setting out the Council's wider capital programme.
60. Each year that I was Leader, I was invited to attend the TMO Board strategy "Away day", in order to meet members of the Board, to answer questions about Council policy and to hear about issues of concern to the Board. I attended these sessions each year except for 2017 when the General Election was underway.
61. I also attended the annual Autumn TMO conference, held in Kensington, which attracted a turnout of several hundred tenants and leaseholders. As mentioned above I would run an "Ask Nick" question and answer session open to everyone.

#### *Grenfell Tower*

62. I had been aware of Grenfell Tower for a number of years on the basis that it was part of RBKC's housing stock. I knew that it was an early 1970's high rise residential block, but had no specific knowledge in relation to its original design, construction or composition. Prior to the renovation which started in 2014, I had no knowledge of any prior works undertaken at the Tower.
63. Following the capital receipt from the sale of Housing Revenue Account long leases in Elm Park Gardens in 2010-11, the Council's housing department asked the TMO to advise it on what capital works were most urgent. The Cabinet was told that following a consultation by the TMO, Grenfell Tower was in greatest need of

investment to address a number of long-standing issues relating to the centralised heating system, poor insulation and leaking windows. This was reported in the 2 May 2012 Cabinet Meeting (Exh NPB/6).

64. In my role as Cabinet Member for the Environment and Transport, I was involved with the project to construct a new Kensington Leisure Centre. My key aim was to research the scope of the project by visiting other leisure centres within London, taking officers and other Members of RBKC, in order to assess what would work in relation to layout, facilities, accessibility and flexibility. I did not write any report. This would have been undertaken by appropriate Council officers.
65. The leisure centre stands a few metres from Grenfell and I was also aware of the construction of the new Kensington Aldridge Academy (KAA), which was another element of the regeneration of this part of the Notting Barns Ward.
66. These three developments all required planning permission which would have been handled by the Council's planning department. Part of this development raised concerns regarding pedestrian safety in and around the area, which needed to be balanced against vehicular access to the buildings. I understand that rising bollards were installed on the new walkway between the Academy and leisure centre in order to allow approved or emergency vehicles access to the site whilst keeping it safe for children using the Academy and visitors to the Leisure Centre. I have no more detailed knowledge of this.
67. The report by the Director of Housing which was presented to the Cabinet on 2 May 2012 (Ex NPB/6) confirmed that the indicative costings for the refurbishment at Grenfell Tower was £6m. This would include replacement of the centralised boiler with individual heating systems in each flat, new windows, external thermal cladding improvements to the entrance hall, and the creation of additional "hidden homes" on the lower floors of the Tower. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property would receive updates on the project.



68. At the Cabinet meeting on 18 July 2013 (Exh NPB/4), following more detailed costings and the decision to re-tender, the Cabinet was asked to increase the budget for the refurbishment of the Grenfell Tower to £9.7 million. This increased sum would also include provision of a new children's nursery and replacement premises for the Dale Boxing Club. The increased budget was approved.
69. Exhibits NPB/4 and NPB/6 are typical examples of Cabinet papers in that they contain the scope of the works to be undertaken, financial considerations, details of the consultation and a timetable for works. They would not contain technical detail in relation to what materials were to be used.
70. The Cabinet minutes from 19 June 2014 (Exh NPB/7) show that a further request was made to Cabinet to increase the budget to £10.3 million to make provision for a contingency of 6% in the refurbishment works. This application was also approved.
71. The Cabinet was twice asked to increase the original budget for the refurbishment of the Tower. In approving each increase, we felt that this investment and upgrade of facilities would yield huge benefits to those within Grenfell Tower and reflected our manifesto commitment to improving the quality of the Council's housing stock.
72. As Leader of the Council I was aware of the general scope of the renovation of Grenfell Tower, for example, I knew that the ineffective centralised heating system would be replaced by individual heating and hot water systems in each flat, giving tenants greater control of their systems, windows would be replaced with double glazed units and external cladding added to improve insulation and reduce heat loss. I was particularly keen to support the replacement of the nursery and the Dale boxing club.
73. As I have said (above) in relation to the level of detail contained in Cabinet papers, I was keen that these should address the scope of the works but would not expect papers to cover details of the specific materials to be used as the Cabinet would have no expert knowledge about this. I expected all designs and materials to meet



regulatory and statutory requirements. I had the same expectations relating to fire safety measures intended to protect residents.

74. As the project progressed, those works would be subject to regular inspection by relevant regulators. Clearly this was a large scheme, undertaken whilst residents remained in situ and they inevitably experienced a degree of disruption and inconvenience as the works progressed. The complaints that reached the Council about this, were taken seriously.
75. As mentioned above (in paragraph 51), in December 2015 a petition was presented to the Council Meeting. It was signed by 51 residents and asked the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee to "undertake an urgent scrutiny of the TMO and Rydon's management of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower". It said that residents' views had been ignored or downplayed and that day-to-day concerns were belittled and side-lined. It acknowledged that when completed, the Tower would "at long last be fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" but said that residents had had to endure living conditions that were intolerable.
76. I understand that Mr Edward Daffarn (a resident of Grenfell Tower) was invited to speak to the Housing and Property Scrutiny Committee when it considered the petition on 6 January 2016. I understand that he raised a number of points about the contractors and the works. I further understood from subsequent conversations with colleagues that a working group would be set up to look at the consultation process, conducted by the TMO, so that lessons could be learned for future refurbishments. The CEO of the TMO said that, to his knowledge, all complaints raised had been dealt with. The working group would be set up once the works had been concluded.
77. At its meeting on 5 January 2016, the Board of the TMO agreed that a group of Board Members would review the issues raised in the petition presented to the Council as indicated above. Six Board Members met in February and agreed to spend a full day on the review on 12 March. This would include a tour of the Tower and full consideration of each of the points raised. The Group concluded that there were

a number of significant issues raised by the project and that residents would have suffered inconvenience.

78. Based on this information I was satisfied that when complaints were raised, the Council was properly responsive and referred them to the appropriate department or body (including the TMO), for thorough follow up and action.
79. I have no recollection of receiving or having referred to me any concerns about fire safety from the residents of Grenfell Tower, except for the power surges experienced in 2013, which were investigated and resolved.
80. I visited Grenfell Tower in June 2016 towards the end of the refurbishment when work appeared to be drawing to a conclusion. There was still some minor work being undertaken at the nursery and in some of the flats. I returned a few weeks later to attend a ceremony where George Groves (WBA super-middleweight champion) formally re-opened the Dale Boxing Club where he had trained.

*14 June 2017*

81. I received a telephone call at 2.55 a.m. from Cllr Maighread Condon Simmonds who immediately informed me that there was a major fire at Grenfell Tower. I dressed and drove to North Kensington arriving at around 3.45 a.m. It was my recollection that it was light when I arrived and I will never forget turning onto Lancaster Road and seeing the Tower burning from top to bottom.
82. I was telephoned by Cllr Gerard Hargreaves, Cabinet Member for Communities and the Voluntary Sector. He and I, in a state of great shock, walked to the vicinity of the Tower.
83. We met Cllr Rock Feilding-Mellen, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, and Robert Black, the CEO of the TMO near the Tower. At that stage we did not know how many people had been evacuated, but everyone said how quickly the flames had spread. I spoke to some residents who had come out from their homes on the corner of Sirdar Road and Treadgold Street.

84. On arrival at the scene I identified myself as the Leader of the Council in order to get past the outer cordon. I spoke to a number of police officers and asked basic questions such as if they knew how many people had been rescued or were still in the building, if a cause of the fire was known etc. They did not know how many people had escaped from the building or were still inside, nor give a cause of the fire other than to say it appeared to have started in a flat fairly near ground level. I did not attempt to speak to any fire officials as I did not want to delay or distract them from their work.
85. At around 4.30 a.m. I telephoned the Town Clerk, Nicholas Holgate, who already knew about the fire and said that he was contacting senior staff. I did not see him at Grenfell Tower at this time, but he subsequently confirmed that he had been at the site, prior to going to the Town Hall.
86. Nicholas Holgate confirmed that the Borough's Emergency Plan had been activated, that the duty officer had been at the scene since the early morning, a Borough Emergency Call Centre (BECC) was being established and that a "Gold" Command meeting would be held once Council officers had reached the Town Hall. Some would come to North Kensington first. Arrangements for opening immediate rest centres in the vicinity of the Tower were in hand.
87. As Leader I was aware of the Council's responsibilities to plan for major emergencies in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This set out a description of "Gold" and "Silver" structures which would come into operation at local and London level. Whilst I was familiar with the concept of emergency responses and the establishment of respite centres, I did not have in-depth knowledge in relation to these provisions as these responsibilities fell to the Town Clerk and the Borough's Emergency Planning Officer who I knew had attended briefings and trainings on London Resilience.
88. I am unable to give details in relation to specific agreements or arrangements with voluntary and community organisations for the use of their premises, or details of how the multi-agency effort was coordinated beyond the establishment of the



Borough's Gold Command which would activate all necessary Council departments. My understanding on the morning of the fire was that this was being put into place and that the efforts and contribution of community groups was swift and comprehensive. My assumption at the time was that the Council's long-standing policy of working with these groups was widely understood and appreciated.

89. Whilst in the vicinity of the Tower I was stopped by various media companies with requests for interviews. I gave a number of "pavement" interviews during which I expressed my great sadness and shock about the fire, promising to support any investigation into its cause and rapid spread.
90. I was aware that Central Government had called a COBRA meeting in response to the fire and assumed that I would hear about the decisions it took in due course. I did not expect to be invited to any COBRA meetings as these are for Senior Ministers and Civil Servants.
91. The Council's press office was in touch with me in relation to the large number of requests received from media organisations. Approaches were also made direct to me via my mobile phone but due to the number of calls, messages and emails, it was impossible for me to respond reactively as I was using the phone to keep in contact with the Town Hall.
92. Following a walk around the cordon area where I spoke to some more residents. I gave interviews to the BBC Today Programme and Sky News. Afterwards I visited the Latimer Christian Centre which was providing support for residents from the Tower, some of whom had lost relatives and were requesting information about which hospitals survivors had been taken to.
93. I returned to the Town Hall sometime in the middle of the morning and joined the Gold Meeting before it ended. It was first of two that day. Approximately fifteen senior departmental staff or their representatives were present.



94. The meeting was able to confirm that two further rest centres had been established; one at Rugby Portobello Trust ("RPT") and one at the Clement James Centre ("CJC"), and that Council managers were now at each, in addition to the Red Cross (at RPT). A further rest centre was to be established at Westway Sports Centre, and would include emergency overnight accommodation. Block bookings of hotel accommodation for the forthcoming weekend were being made for residents of Grenfell Tower, and the surrounding evacuated areas and liaison was underway with nearby schools, as some pupils either lived in the Tower or on the neighbouring estate. Foster carers were being identified and lists drawn up of residents of the Tower who were known to receive support from various Council services. A centre for relatives and friends of residents was also being established.
95. Arrangements were made to provide the residents with cash for essentials. Nicholas Holgate said that other Boroughs had offered help and resources, and that this would be used to provide additional support at the rest centres, and that a further Gold meeting would take place at 3 p.m.
96. Once I have been briefed by Nicholas Holgate on the part of the Gold Meeting that I had missed, I prepared a few notes on the actions agreed and spoke to my office. I returned to Grenfell and gave a series of media interviews for the lunchtime news. They all focused on the cause of the fire and the role of the cladding. At this time, 12 people were reported to have died. I was shocked by one interviewer's question seeking guarantees from me that "the poorer people who are moved out would not be replaced by rich people being built fancy new flats". I responded suggesting that was an "awful" allegation to make and that the Tower had just had £10m spent on refurbishment to improve it for the people who lived in it. There was no suggestion that they should live anywhere else, or that we planned to move any residents out of the Borough.
97. During the afternoon, I took part in a press conference with the Fire and Police Commanders in Lancaster Road.

98. Afterwards I visited the Rugby Portobello Club (the same as RPT) with two colleagues. It was full on both levels with distressed families waiting for news. Police, fire officials and Council officers were all present at the Club. Whilst there, I spoke to a number of people, including an officer from the Council's housing department, whose name I did not register. This conversation was in relation to the efforts which were being made to identify suitable overnight accommodation.
99. I was acutely aware of the assistance and efforts that front line staff were making in a number of locations around the Tower. I knew I would receive additional information about the amount of accommodation required from the Gold meetings in due course and did not want to be a distraction once I was satisfied that help was being provided. It appeared that Council staff, TMO officers, community workers and volunteers alongside the emergency services were all working closely together in the locations that I visited. Other colleagues were visiting other relief centres.
100. I returned to the Town Hall where I received an update from the afternoon Gold meeting, which had been informed that residents were being taken to hotels by taxi. Overall one hundred rooms had been booked in order to provide immediate temporary accommodation. I was not aware of the specific details of all of the hotels as this was being dealt with by the relevant Council departments. It was reported that some residents had chosen to stay with friends or relatives rather than being taken to a hotel. It had been agreed that Westway Sports Centre would remain open that night, with thirty households reported as being in the Clement James Centre. A centre for relatives and friends was operating out of the Salvation Army base in Portobello Road.
101. The Borough Emergency Control Centre was up and running and RBKC staff rotas and shifts were being worked out. A note from Nicholas Holgate to all Councillors that evening reported that three rest centres had been operating and that officers from children's' services, adult social care and housing were working with the bereaved.
102. My understanding of the Emergency Plan was that it focussed on the precise and detailed role that officers of the Council would fulfil. There was no specific

definition of roles for Members, other than to ensure that they were briefed on the details of the relief operation. Based on my attendance at Gold meetings and my conversations with the Town Clerk and Senior Officers, it appeared to me that all appropriate and available staff resources were actively focussed on responding to the tragedy, and providing the humanitarian assistance as required.

103. I saw a key role for myself as being to establish what the Gold operation had been doing to provide support, particularly in terms of money and accommodation, and to attempt to communicate this to colleagues, the public and the media. However, that objective had to compete with a large number of media queries about how many other buildings were covered in similar cladding and whether the cladding on the nearby Kensington Aldridge Academy was the same type as had been used on the Tower. These were questions that I could not answer because I did not know. I relayed this back to RBKC's press office.
104. I took calls from the newly appointed Fire Minister, Nick Hurd, and the new Housing Minister, Alok Sharma, who offered their sympathy and support. Throughout this terrible day, the Council's priority was to provide accommodation for survivors, to support relatives of survivors who were seeking news of missing family members and to ensure that they had money. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Cllr Warwick Lightfoot, had contacted me earlier in the day to say that any financial support needed by survivors, could and would be met by the Council.
105. The Council was also starting to face a major logistical challenge managing, distributing and storing the huge number of donations which were flooding in.
106. I spent much of Wednesday (14<sup>th</sup>), Thursday (15<sup>th</sup>) and Friday (16<sup>th</sup>) mornings in the area around Grenfell. There were many Councillors and officers on the ground providing support. Several senior officers were also handling logistics at Kensington Town Hall as donations of food, clothing and toiletries poured in. Councillors were passing back requests and observations to Gold meetings or to the BECC. At a rapidly arranged meeting on Thursday evening with Conservative Members, I asked for their feedback and sought to ensure that they were spreading their visits across



to all the support centres which had opened their doors, and to visit these at different times of the day so that each centre got a morning, lunchtime and evening visit to ensure that any problems could be rapidly picked up by the Council.

107. North Kensington is a diverse community and different residents had particular community centres that they identified with, many of which had close links with particular Councillors. The Council had supported these centres over many years and it did not surprise or concern me that their premises were being used to provide relief.
108. In retrospect, the Council could have considered requiring Members and officers from RBKC to wear high visibility jackets, which identified them as being from the Council, if these were available. It was normal procedure that staff should wear lanyards with their Council passes on display. Due to the intensity of the crisis, this issue of identification was not a matter which was high on the Gold agenda or mine. RBKC wanted people on the ground doing their jobs and identifying what needed to be done. During my visits I saw and spoke to a number of familiar officers. However, if staff were not displaying their lanyards, and I did not recognise them, I would not be able to distinguish them as RBKC staff specifically.
109. The Council had over many years enjoyed good and long term relations with the community and voluntary sectors, therefore I expected Council officers and local volunteers to come together in crisis and work together seamlessly.
110. Several senior national politicians made visits to the area in the days immediately following the tragedy, although there was little or no coordination with RBKC. The Mayor of London visited and I offered to meet him. I was advised this invitation had been declined. I was told on Thursday morning (15<sup>th</sup>) that the Prime Minister had visited Grenfell Tower, but I had no prior knowledge of this, or discussion with her office about her visit. Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Opposition also visited that day.
111. One of the main aims of the Gold meetings at this early stage focussed on the need for provision of wrap-around care so that survivors and homeless families displaced

from the finger blocks were not faced with a host of different social workers handling different support issues. There was also recognition of the need for practical actions such as survivors needing money, and recognition that they were unlikely to have any means of identification. It was agreed to provide each of them with an immediate cash package of £500. There were also concerns relating to residents in the finger blocks in Lancaster West which adjoined the Tower. Later I sent a note to all my colleagues (NPB/8).

112. At the Gold meeting on Thursday at the request of Nicholas Holgate, two officers from Southwark attended to give advice based on their experience of dealing with the aftermath of the 2009 Lakanal House fire. He felt that they had the most relevant and recent experience which could be used for the benefit of the survivors.
113. I was satisfied that from the first hours of the fire, through to Thursday (15<sup>th</sup>) evening, Council officers were undertaking a wide range of functions, from identifying the temporary hotel accommodation, providing support to affected schools and grieving families, distributing money to survivors, and handling donations. Front line staff were working in a variety of locations operated by voluntary and community group, but this was as I expected.
114. The Council did not have a separate building in North Kensington and was well aware of the fact that different residents identified themselves with particular centres. The effort was being co-ordinated by Gold Command based at Kensington Town Hall. If I could not be present at those meetings, I asked my Deputy or another member of the Cabinet to attend and brief me afterwards.
115. On Thursday evening, I had a conversation with the Red Cross to discuss how they could help to co-ordinate the enormous number of donations and provide additional relief. People wanted to donate, but preferably not to the Council. I asked them to liaise with the Kensington & Chelsea Foundation which is an independent charitable trust based in the Borough which was starting to receive significant financial donations. Following this, I held the meeting with Conservative Councillors. It was

around this time that local Gold Command decided to intensify the level of response to the tragedy to the level of London Gold, and I was told about this on Friday.

116. On Thursday evening I agreed to a live TV interview with BBC Newsnight. I was asked whether I had ever been in the Tower (which I had on two occasions), and for details of the cladding and how widespread its use was. In particular I was asked to comment on the fact that sprinklers had not been installed. I explained my understanding that sprinklers had not been installed in the original building and that retro-fitting them would have required drilling into asbestos, which in turn would have necessitated moving residents out of their homes, for an unspecified period. This had been explained to me by a fire officer earlier that day and was not an issue which had been considered by the Council. In addition I said in the interview that it was my understanding that the general concept of containment meant that a fire would ordinarily be expected to be confined.
117. I added that many high rise buildings around the country had used similar cladding as a means of improving energy-efficiency and insulation, and that many 1960s and 1970s flats do not have sprinklers. This was not an attempt by me or RBKC to justify the horrific events of the 14<sup>th</sup> June. The selection and approval of building materials was dealt with through the procurement process by professional staff and needed to meet regulatory requirements. It was not something I had any specialist knowledge on.
118. Some of the media questions assumed that the Council had undertaken the refurbishment directly. It became clear that the role of the Tenant Management Organisation, as a separate legal structure with its own Board, which enabled tenants and leaseholders to manage their properties, was not well understood.
119. On Friday morning the Secretary of State for Local Government, Sajid Javid, visited the Westway Sports Centre and I met him along with other Councillors. Two surviving families remained in the hall and he met them. He urged me to find accommodation on Right Move if there was not enough empty Council or Housing Association property that could be used. He said that money would not be a problem,



that the Government had already pledged £5m, and that the department could help with identifying housing. We discussed the Bellwin Scheme which provides emergency financial support to Councils following a disaster<sup>3</sup>.

120. The full scale of the disaster continued to develop and the Borough's own emergency plan was escalated as London Gold in order to supplement the Borough's own efforts. This was intended to provide the necessary additional resources in terms of officers and managers, with the appropriate skills, to handle a major emergency.
121. The scale of the tragedy was now developing additional dimensions, including the increased pressure presented by surrounding homes close to the Tower having to be evacuated, and those residents also requiring humanitarian assistance. Additionally, families and friends of residents of the Tower were arriving, seeking information about loved ones. This quickly became a crisis on a scale that London had not witnessed since the end of the War and that no local plan alone could accommodate.
122. On my return to the Town Hall from the Westway Sports Centre at lunchtime on Friday (16<sup>th</sup>), I met Nicholas Holgate and John Barradell (the Head of London Gold) for a briefing on that morning's meeting and the initiation of the London Gold Operation. I was then advised by the Police to leave the Town Hall ahead of the demonstration which was due to take place that afternoon. This I did and I continued to follow their advice to stay at home on Saturday, where I caught up with a large number of emails, texts and voicemails. The vast majority were offering sympathy to the Borough and some contained offers of help (of different kinds), which I forwarded to the appropriate officers.
123. I understood that there was a strong feeling locally and that the police were concerned that my presence could aggravate or upset those who had been affected by this tragedy. This was becoming apparent as I left the Westway Sports Centre on Friday morning. I was concerned to learn that the Friday afternoon Gold Meeting had had to be terminated following the demonstration at Kensington Town Hall. One

<sup>3</sup> Guidance on this is available on the .GOV website, but post-dates the fire : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bellwin-scheme-guidance-notes-for-claims>

of the main agenda items for this meeting was to arrange weekend shifts and rotas at the Sports Centre in order to ensure continuous cover for the survivors. The meeting had to be moved to Westminster City Hall.

124. I accepted advice not to speak to the media on the basis that I could not properly give an answer to the questions being posed about materials and the reasons for the rapid spread of the fire.
125. At around 5.45 p.m. on Friday, I was called by the Prime Minister. This was my first conversation with her in relation to the crisis. She asked me to ensure that people had money and that they were offered housing as quickly as possible. A support unit from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) would help with this. She said that she had been to the Clement James Centre, and had been told that they had received "no communication" from the Council. I was unable to comment on this, but I was surprised as I had understood colleagues and Council officers to have been at the centre.
126. The Prime Minister asked me how many people would need accommodation and we discussed the situation as it stood at that time. There was no discussion of her visit the previous day to the Kensington Leisure Centre (this was the base for the Fire and Emergency Services, with the nearby Westway Sports Centre the focus of support for survivors and relatives). The two centres were in close proximity.
127. I did not know in advance that the Prime Minister would be visiting the Clement James Centre. The Leader of the Opposition had already visited this location and if I had been notified of her visit in advance, I would have suggested, as an alternative, that she went to the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre in Acklam Road. This was providing a wide range of support services to survivors who worshipped at the mosque and I believe they would have greatly appreciated a visit from the Prime Minister.

128. Subsequent to her call, I spoke to Nicholas Holgate who told me that in a conference call earlier that afternoon, the Prime Minister had required survivors to be re-housed (albeit in temporary accommodation) within three weeks.
129. On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June, due to the unprecedented volume of global media requests, the Council accepted an offer from Newgate Communications, who had experience of handling disasters, to act pro bono to help with the huge volume of media enquiries. Newgate worked alongside the Council's in-house communications team, which from recollection was no more than five people.
130. The Council recognised the need that the public would have questions and that our resources prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> June would not be able to cope. In order to assist with the volume of enquiries additional specialist communication resources were required.
131. Newgate helped me to draft a personal statement published on the Council's website home page (including my official blog) which was also available for wider distribution about the tragedy. At this time, it had been reported that fifty-eight people had died. On Saturday, I sent a note to all Councillors setting out the new Gold arrangements. (NPB/9).
132. I returned to the Westway Centre shortly after 8 a.m. on Sunday morning and held conversations with volunteers from the Red Cross and a housing assessment team staffed by officers from neighbouring boroughs. Next to them was the Housing Allocations Team made up of the Council's own officers, urgently trying to identify suitable accommodation. I was informed by a NHS team that survivors who did not have details of their medication could ask them to check records with GPs in order to be provided with replacement prescriptions. The centre also had grief counsellors and psychologists in situ to assist with those in attendance.
133. Later that evening I was informed by Cllr Mary Weale that she had received reports that there were no Council staff at the Westway Centre until 7 p.m., when in fact she had personal knowledge that representatives had been there since 10 a.m. We were



concerned at the suggestion that Council staff were not present, and considered this to be an inaccurate report.

134. On Monday Morning (19<sup>th</sup> June) my Deputy and I attended a minute's silence, arranged by the church in memory of the victims of the fire, held at the Kensington War Memorial. Following this we held a meeting with Newgate Communications at which we were advised of their plans for supplementing our Communications Team and organising rotas of duty officers, to assist them provide some relief from the immense pressure the team had been under.
135. Following this I attended the morning Gold Meeting. We had around twenty of our own social workers along with thirty to forty from other London Boroughs on site. The meeting was told that sixty-six care workers and occupational health specialists had been on duty since Wednesday, with two hundred and twenty families being accommodated in hotels.
136. That afternoon, along with the senior officer responsible for communities, I met Mustapha Almansour who I had seen at the head of the protest at the Town Hall last Friday along with a colleague of his who used to live in Grenfell Tower. They are involved with Justice 4 Grenfell. They asked for a list of the missing and the dead and wanted a commitment that all those affected by the fire would be "immediately" rehoused in the Borough. I agreed to meet them again when I had more information but made it clear that it is the Police and not the Council who were responsible for these lists.
137. In the evening, at my request an emergency meeting of the Conservative Group was held. It was chaired by Greg Hands MP, newly appointed Minister for London and MP for Chelsea. I gave a detailed factual statement (NPB/10) covering the actions taken by the Council since last Wednesday. Once this was completed, I again offered to resign the Leadership, and withdrew from the meeting to allow an open and frank discussion. My resignation offer was ultimately rejected by what I was told was by a strong majority.

138. On Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> the Gold Meeting was told that a number of staff were exhausted and that morale was poor following the tragedy and way the media was portraying the Council's response. The initiation of London Gold the previous Friday (16<sup>th</sup>), brought in hundreds of other Council officers from other London Boroughs and was intended to provide relief and additional resources, but was in my view largely presented as a sign that the Council could not cope. The reality was that that some 600 additional officers were involved in the Grenfell relief over the following weeks and there was no way that any single Council would ever have that number of specialist staff available.
139. During the afternoon, along with Cllrs Gerard Hargreaves and Mary Weale, I visited the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre (MCHC) where a huge number of volunteers were handling donations. We walked around the main hall with the Director of the centre. I spoke to a lady wearing Shayla within the main hall, who was staffing one of the desks in connection with school support. I had assumed that she was a volunteer or a member of the MCHC, but it transpired that she worked for the Borough's education department, although it was not obvious that she was employed by RBKC. It again raised the issue of visibility of the Council staff to me.
140. On my way back from this meeting, I received a call from the Secretary of State for Local Government, Sajid Javid, saying that it would be necessary for me to dismiss the Council's Town Clerk and the Chief Executive of the TMO. I offered my resignation but it was declined. Over the following 24 hours, I spoke to both Nicholas Holgate and Robert Black and we discussed their respective resignations. Robert Black reminded me his appointment was a matter for the TMO Board and not the Council or Government, therefore I had no power to remove him from his position.
141. In conjunction with Newgate, the Council sought to keep the public and media updated in relation to the actions taken in relation to accommodating those affected by the fire. This was done via daily bulletins.
142. On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> I received a call from Lord Porter, Chair of the Local Government Association, who urged me to appoint a new Chief Executive or he

thought that the Government would appoint Commissioners to run the Council. The strong recommendation was that I should appoint Barry Quirk, the long-serving Chief Executive of Lewisham on an interim basis, which I did. We were unable to meet that day as the Town Hall was "locked down" due to what the media were reporting was a planned "Day of Rage" being organised by activists who did not appear to be representative of the survivors. This was the second time within five days that the relief effort had suffered major disruption.

143. The Prime Minister had stated to the new House of Commons (following the 7<sup>th</sup> June General Election) that the response to the fire in the initial hours was not good enough, stating there had been a "failure of the state at local and national level to help people when they needed it most". The Council had initiated the Emergency Response Plan, and staff and resources had been rapidly deployed. As the scale and complexity of the support needed grew, London Resilience was put in place with the Council continuing to operate the local Gold operation to ensure that the extremely diverse needs of traumatised survivors were being met. I felt that the Council had been doing all it could and had been working closely with long-term partners in the community and voluntary sectors in North Kensington.
144. Prior to the Prime Minister addressing the Commons on 22 June, I was not aware of the existence of the Grenfell Tower Recovery Task Force, which she had chaired. As part of her address she indicated that there would be a new strategy for resilience in major disasters, which I understood to be a recognition of the fact that no single Council could be expected to cope with the scale of this type of tragedy. I assumed that this could mean an institution along the lines of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States.
145. In the Commons, the Prime Minister responded to calls for my resignation by stating that "I have had a conversation with the Leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council. I told him that he needed to ensure that residents, victims and survivors of this terrible disaster were being given the help and support they need. We have now added more help and support to ensure that that is happening on the ground".



146. I felt that the Council, working with London Gold and a range of community groups, was doing all it could to support survivors but that somehow this was not being accurately reported.
147. Shortly after this the Council, through Newgate issued a statement saying "it is clear that there has been a failing in our collective response. We could have done a better job at coordinating what happened on the ground and we weren't able to re-home people as fast as we would have liked. We are truly sorry for that". I regret approving this statement as it appeared to accept criticisms which I believed were unjustified in the circumstances. It failed to recognise the immense hard work of large numbers of Council officers and it made out that providing suitable housing, even temporarily, was an easy matter that we had simply failed to handle swiftly enough. It also, in my opinion, failed to take account of the stress and potential pressure survivors may feel in relation to accepting suitable offers of accommodation within the time limit set by the Prime Minister.
148. At the Gold meeting we were informed that two hundred and sixty-eight families were accommodated the previous night. It was confirmed that the Army had been called in to fix the community boilers which had been affected by the fire and were not currently providing hot water to Lancaster West. It was estimated this would take up to two weeks to remedy.
149. On Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June, I wrote to the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd (Exh NPB/11), as there was concern that some Home Office Staff at the Westway Centre were not aware of the promise that survivors' immigration statuses would not be challenged. It was important that this was clarified and the extent of this exemption was clearly understood, for example, did it include the properties surrounding Grenfell Tower where a number of residents had also been required to leave their homes.
150. I began to prepare for the Cabinet meeting being held on Thursday (29<sup>th</sup> June) which had been in the diary for some time. My intention was to deliver my statement providing Members with an account what the Council had done since the early hours of 14 June, and to encourage questions from Members regards the Council's

activities over the previous fourteen days. The advice that I received from the Town Clerk was that the Cabinet meeting should be held in private due to the risk of public disorder. The fear was based on the demonstrations which had taken place over the preceding days. I shared his opinion that this would be the only way Councillors could have an open discussion of the events of the last two weeks.

151. Moments before the meeting began, I was advised that the High Court had granted an injunction to "The Guardian" late that afternoon. My understanding at the time was that if the Press were granted access to the meeting then it would not be possible to deny the public access. (I was subsequently told that in fact it would have been possible to exclude the public). I interpreted this to mean that if the Press came into the room, I could finish my statement but would then need to terminate the meeting, as a free and open discussion would not be possible with the Press present and to continue the discussion may prejudice the Public Inquiry process.
152. When the meeting began, the Press had not arrived and I began to read my statement (Exh NPB/12). The Press entered the room and I continued to deliver my statement. During my delivery, I was passed a written note by the interim Chief Executive, which provided me with the advice to close the meeting as I had been verbally recommended to do minutes before the meeting started. I therefore concluded my statement and closed the meeting. This was not an attempt to avoid public scrutiny but to follow the legal advice I had received. In retrospect it would probably have been better to adjourn the meeting and take further legal advice.
153. On Friday 30 June, following a visit that the Deputy Leader and I made to the London Gold operation at Westminster, I was advised by Greg Hands MP, the new Minister for London, that my resignation was now required. At 5.30 p.m. I announced my resignation (NPB/13) as Leader of the Council, indicating that it was not right that I should be a focus in the aftermath, when so many had died or were unaccounted for.
154. In relation to the adequacy of the response by RBKC, it is my genuine belief that the Council dealt with this unparalleled crisis as effectively as it could, with the

resources it had available to it and the immense strains being placed upon it. This was best demonstrated by all the relevant departments and their senior management teams responding with total commitment. Despite these efforts it is evident that there are difficult issues, which were present in the immediate aftermath, which remain nearly 18 months later.

155. It is my sincere wish that the Public Inquiry helps to provide answers to those affected by this tragedy, so that lessons may be learned to prevent any repetition of the terrible events of the 14 June 2017.

- END OF STATEMENT -



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.

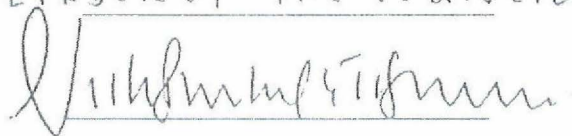
Full name:

NICHOLAS PAGET-BROWN

Position or office held:

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL 2013-2017

Signed:



Date:

31.10. 2018

# GRENFELL TOWER

## PUBLIC INQUIRY

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### Witness Statement of

Nicholas Paget-Brown

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