

**GRENFELL TOWER
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

**Witness Statement of
Somayya Yaqub**

I, SOMAYYA YAQUB, WILL SAY:

1. I make this witness statement following the request by the Public Inquiry via their Rule 9 letter dated 5th June 2018, under cover of their letter dated 10th July 2019.
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 'RBKC'), 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 body of this statement.
4. I have not been interviewed by the Metropolitan Police Service, nor provided a witness statement to them regarding the events leading up to the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017.
5. It is difficult to put in words how and to what extent the Grenfell Tower fire has affected those connected with it, and will continue to do so over the forthcoming years. My thoughts remain with everyone whose lives changed that night and I wish to express my sincere condolences to the bereaved, survivors and residents who undoubtedly have been affected the most.

Background and qualifications

6. I graduated from University in 2002 with an Environmental Health BSc. I commenced employment with Westminster Council where I joined the Environmental Health department, initially as a contractor within the Environmental Health private housing sector team. I was employed in this role between 2002 and 2004.
7. In 2005 I attained my Environmental Health Registration Board (EHRB) qualification which allowed me to practice as an Environmental Health Officer (EHO). The same year I moved to Hammersmith and Fulham Council ("LBHF") initially as an EHO before being promoted to the position of Environmental Protection Manager. In 2007 I obtained my PGDip in acoustics which was relevant to my role as an EHO.
8. The Environmental Health Service integrated with RBKC around 2013 as part of the Bi-Borough structure. In the same year I attained the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) certificate in relation to Managing Safely. At this time I remained employed in the Environmental Health Team, dealing with noise and nuisance, but I had a strong interest in health and safety. I was appointed the health and safety champion of the Public Protection Department (LBHF) and would meet with other colleagues regards risk assessments, training, accidents and incidents and other concerns within our department. The safety champions met on a quarterly basis, the meetings were minuted and distributed for any follow-up actions to be monitored. I understand these were also relayed to the Corporate Health and Safety team. I attach a copy of the minutes from a meeting on 13 July 2012 by way of example (Exhibit SY/01).
9. As a health and safety champion I was able to attend the Main Co-ordinating Committee and Bi-borough Corporate Health and Safety Committee. I recall attending a couple of meetings out of interest but do not recall when these may have been.

10. In 2015 I was approached by Richard Buckley (Head of Environmental Health (Residential)) who was my line manager and the Department Head to whom the Corporate Health and Safety team reported. He asked if I would be interested in applying for the Bi-Borough Corporate Health and Safety Manager role; Gary Mann, who occupied the permanent post at the time, was leaving the Council and they were looking to appoint his successor. Following a formal application for the role and interview conducted by both Gary and Richard, I was offered the role of Bi-Borough Corporate Health and Safety manager on an interim basis, initially for 12 months, with effect from January 2016 in accordance with the revised job specification and responsibilities (Exhibit SY/02).
11. During my employment as an EHO I was trained as a Local Authority Liaison Officer ("LALO") and attained the ranking of silver. This was whilst I was at LBHF. As manager of that team I had been called upon to deal with flooding issues and a small fire in a property within LBHF (although I cannot recall specifically which property this was in). I was not employed as a LALO after I moved to the Bi-borough Corporate Health and Safety team on the basis that my focus migrated to business continuity and emergency contingency plans. Any major incidents would be responded to by Directors in accordance with the respective Borough Contingency Plans.
12. I officially took up post on 1 January 2016. Gary left RBKC with effect on 23 December 2015 due to leave entitlements. Gary and I had a handover period in November and December 2015. Gary prepared a handover document in which he outlined the Corporate Health and Safety team's roles and responsibilities, team members and their individual roles and responsibilities, audits and key issues going forward (Exhibit SY/03).
13. I did read the document which Gary wrote for me and referred to it in terms of familiarising myself with the skillsets of the health and safety advisors within the team and their general workload. It was also useful in relation to understanding the relationship with AMEY (the Total Facilities Management (TFM) company) who were engaged to manage the non-residential buildings

under the Tri-borough scheme. Their compliance was my main focus in this role.

14. Personally I found the document quite heavy reading and I would defer to Richard Buckley, particularly in relation to the current business plan for the year as I commenced my role in January. I took my direction from him and we would discuss matters beyond the facts as set out in Gary's document.
15. After a year in post my role was confirmed by Richard Buckley as being a permanent appointment in January 2017.
16. In early 2017 I attained my National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) certificate regards fire safety and risk management as part of my professional development.
17. I left LBHF and RBKC in July 2018.

Corporate Health and Safety within RBKC

18. I attach a copy of the Corporate Health and Safety organogram for 2016/2017 (Exhibit SY/04)
19. The Corporate Health and Safety team were responsible for writing policies and procedures for council managed activities. The policies and procedures were not designed or intended to cover any party or scenario which fell outside of the team's remit, including the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ("TMO"). The team were also responsible for the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and Fire Safety Policy which were the principal health and safety policies for the Council. These policies were reviewed on an annual basis during my time in post, or following any significant changes in relevant regulatory provisions / guidance, or legislation. I cannot recall any examples of legislative changes during my employment which resulted in the need to revise the policies. However it was my practise to direct team members to provide updates to the Senior Management Team in relation to new guidance in order for consideration to be given as to whether

policies needed to be revised. An example of this is when I asked Michael Sopp to provide an update on the 6 key areas in the new Health and Safety Executive strategy 2016 (Exhibit SY/05). This generated both awareness and the opportunity to consider if policy change was required. Policies would also be reviewed to incorporate and reflect internal changes such as the Bi-borough and Tri-borough arrangements in relation to relevant departments.

20. I did review both the Corporate Health and Safety Policy and the Fire Safety Policy whilst I was in post. My drafts were sent to Richard Buckley for his views and distributed to the Joint Health and Safety Committee in order to invite comments from all departments and allow the unions to consult on the same. Any comments received by the deadline set at the time of the consultation would be considered and a further review would take place. I do not recall if any comments were made in response to the reviews in 2016.
21. I understand Richard would discuss any proposed amendments with Nick Austin (Bi-borough Director for Environmental Health) before the policy was then sent for formal approval. I am not familiar with which other teams or committees were involved in the approval process but do know that, once approved, the final versions of these revised policies would be signed by the Chief Executive of the Council and Leader in post at that time.
22. I understand that at the time of the tragic fire the Corporate Health and Safety Policy 2016 was in force. I am not sure if the 2016 revised Fire Safety Policy had been adopted or if an earlier version was in force.
23. The team were also required to provide reports to :
 - a. Audit and Pensions Committee (LBHF), annually;
 - b. Audit and Transparency Committee (RBKC), annually ;
 - c. Joint Management Team (Bi-borough), bi-annually.
24. As the Manager of the Corporate Health and Safety team I would attend the Joint Corporate Safety Committee meetings, chaired by Nick Austin. Each Department within the Bi-borough structure would send representatives to participate in the discussions and feedback any issues within their areas. Janice

Wray (Health, Safety and Facilities Manager at the TMO) would usually attend these meetings. The minutes from these meetings, once approved would be uploaded to the intranet and available to all Council staff. They would also be emailed to Janice Wray. These minutes were not published externally and I am not aware whether copies were formally provided to the TMO outside of those sent to Janice; the TMO did not have access to the Council's internal intranet.

25. The Corporate Health and Safety team were an advisory body to Business Groups within RBKC. Each business group should have had a health and safety champion, these were local managers given additional introductory safety training. Corporate Health and Safety remained the main point of contact for health and safety advice, and could be approached for advice by Tri- and Bi-borough services via allocated advisors, or directly. The advisors also covered areas not in their primary focus, as and when needed. During the course of my tenure the number of safety champions increased and we had representation from the majority of services, including Planning and Borough Development.
26. The Corporate Health and Safety team had no enforcement powers or sanctions available to it. Corporate Health and Safety was managed by Richard Buckley and Health and Safety within Environmental Health Services was managed by Annie Ramage. The two teams operated separately. Corporate Health and Safety remained advisory only and would not undertake or participate in any enforcement actions or sanctions being taken by Environmental Health.
27. If any concerns were raised in relation to key issues, these would be reported to Richard Buckley, or in his absence Nick Austin and discussions had as required depending on the severity of the issue. Issues which could apply to more than one department / Directorate would then be raised before the relevant Committee(s) for appropriate action to be taken and the position monitored. Where a particular issue had been raised and remained unresolved for example persistent concerns over the water hygiene management in Corporate Buildings, the Corporate Health and Safety team would raise it again and monitor its progress including raising it with the relevant director for the

service. When referring a matter in this manner, advice in relation to any consequences of non-compliance and potential implications would be tendered explaining why the issue was being raised. If the matter remained unsolved, the team would raise it again with any further advice as required.

28. There was little interaction between me or the team with RBKC's Housing Directorate; I was not familiar with individuals from Housing and had no relationships with them. I would see representatives at various meetings but otherwise our departments operated independently.

Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation ("TMO")

29. The TMO were engaged by RBKC to manage its entire housing portfolio as an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO). As a separate entity the TMO had its own internal governance and reported to its own Board. In relation to health and safety, the TMO had its own Health and Safety Committee, and in-house health and safety team.
30. I was introduced to Janice Wray (Health, Safety and Facilities Manager) by Richard Buckley. I was aware that the TMO, through Janice, produced its own annual health and safety reports to its Board. The same would be provided to me in order for me to extract information for inclusion within the Corporate Health and Safety team's reports, regards the TMO's performance. On occasion I would have to chase Janice for updates or reports but they would always be provided.
31. I accepted the updates from the TMO on the basis that they were prepared for and reported to their Board. I would read the reports and do not recall having any specific concerns. If I had any concerns I would have discussed them with Richard, either face to face or via email. If a concern was merited I would expect Richard to escalate it or advise me who I should escalate it with. I do not recall any examples of this occurring. I trusted the information was accurate and had no reason to question that which was provided.

32. In contrast, information provided by others such as LINK (as a TFM) would be reviewed by the Council on the basis that they were not governed in the same way as the TMO, with a Board to verify the information.

RBKC's Corporate Health and Safety Team's relationship with the TMO

33. I enjoyed a professional working relationship with Janice and worked closely with her on a number of issues, as outlined below. I trusted and respected Janice in relation to her knowledge, experience and positive reputation. Richard Buckley was my Head of service at the time and was complimentary about her. I had no concerns when working with her; she appeared to be proactive, approachable and focussed on resident safety. I believed she was competent in terms of her role albeit I had no personal knowledge of her qualifications beyond her job role at the TMO.
34. Part of Corporate Health and Safety's remit was to check that the TMO had relevant policies and procedures in place which complied with corporate health and safety requirements. The checks I conducted were to verify that the TMO had in place relevant policies such as a health and safety policy and a fire safety policy and that they were current in terms of date. Whilst I read the policies, I was not instructed (by Richard Buckley / RBKC) to review or comment on the adequacy or suitability of the TMO policies, or to critique them. As stated above the TMO had its own Health and Safety Committee, governance arrangements and Board. Janice advised me verbally that these policies would be submitted to the TMO Board for approval.
35. Corporate Health and Safety did not routinely monitor or audit the general safety arrangements for the TMO. I understood that the TMO was audited by RBKC's auditing department, who were on occasion assisted by Deloitte. I do not recall seeing any audit reports in relation to the TMO or hearing of any significant issues as a result of the audits.
36. Initially my interaction with Janice would be at the various common interest meetings we would attend, such as the Joint Corporate Safety Committee, or

requesting updates from the TMO for the various reports RBKC required regards the TMO's performance from the team.

37. I recall having meetings with Janice, and in particular one on 22 June 2016 in relation to the on-going FRA's and fire door programme which the TMO were undertaking across RBKC's full housing stock (Exhibit SY/06). This was in response to a fire at Adair Tower. The Corporate Health and Safety team were not involved in this process other than seeking information to clarify the issues being dealt with.
38. At the meeting Janice told me that there was a "*3 way agreement RBKC – LFB – TMO*". I was not aware of any formal agreement between these organisations and understood it to be that all were working towards the common goal of compliance and taking an open, transparent and proactive approach to achieving it.
39. In the same meeting Janice told me the name of the consultant appointed by the TMO to conduct this programme in relation to the high rise blocks, which I noted as "Carl, a sole Associate". I had no personal knowledge of him at the time and did not seek to research him after the meeting or subsequently. I recall Janice assuring me that he was a competent person and had the relevant qualifications and expertise in order to complete the work. I understood that he was previously employed by Salvus, a fire consultancy RBKC had contracted with, and had been involved in the programme in relation to the low and mid-rise blocks. I trusted Janice's judgement based on my previous experience of her over the preceding months. I believed that the TMO would appoint a properly trained, competent, qualified and experienced fire safety consultant.
40. Janice also advised me that the TMO had devised a separate action plan in order to monitor this programme of works and would prioritise, allocate and monitor each action, following up on each. Janice further explained that reports could be run in relation to the action plan regarding progress, with the results being reported by Barbara Matthews to the TMO's CEO, Robert Black. I do not recall seeing the action plan or reports relating to it.

41. It appeared that the TMO were being proactive in relation to the issues and committed to compliance with the programme with a monitoring process in place. Janice told me that the LFB appeared generally happy with their approach and that no concerns had been expressed. I was not present at any meetings between the TMO and LFB and do not recall seeing any correspondence between them or asking to see any.
42. I would say that I began to work more closely with Janice in August 2016 following a fire at Shepherd's Court, Hammersmith. As Bi-borough manager I was aware that the housing stock in LBHF was not managed by a tenant management organisation and I was keen to understand and compare how each Borough's residential properties were managed and share any good practice from the TMO with LBHF, and from LBHF with the TMO. Janice was very helpful and she spoke to LBHF in relation to a number of topics, including fire risk assessments, fire doors, safety notices and leaseholders.
43. Around the same time questions were being asked in relation to fire risk assessments where residential properties were located above commercial premises. Non-residential premises within RBKC were managed by LINK who were contracted to audit and monitor AMEY's performance of non-TMO properties. RBKC wanted the TMO and LINK to work together in relation to harmonising the FRA's between the different types of properties, which Janice facilitated.
44. In light of the Shepherd's Bush fire, the planned audit on fire safety in relation to LBHF Housing stock was brought forward. As part of the audit I reviewed legislative and other requirements. I then carried out a sample check of the management system and arrangements in place in relation to fire safety.
45. In addition to the above Janice, in an email dated 23 January 2017 provided me with copies of the TMO's Fire Strategy and a draft revision of the same (Exhibits SY/07a-c). The email refers to "*Fire Policy*" but it was the strategy and draft strategy which were attached.

46. In terms of day to day work the TMO was not a main focus for me. Corporate buildings and management of other facility management companies dominated my time as the implementation of the Total Facilities Management contract had significant issues.

Grenfell Tower

47. Prior to the fire I had no specific knowledge of Grenfell Tower; my conversations with Janice were in relation to the housing stock in general and I do not recall any specific conversations regarding Grenfell. I am not able to assist in terms of its design, composition or any of the refurbishment works which I now understand took place there since its construction.

48. Due to the ALMO relationship with the TMO, Corporate Health and Safety had no cause to communicate or provide fire or health and safety advice to the residents of RBKC's housing portfolio, including Grenfell Tower.

Statement of Truth

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

I am willing for my statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and for it to be published on the Inquiry's web site.

Full name: Somayya Yaqub

Position or office held: Former Bi-Borough Corporate Health and Safety Manager (January 2016 – July 2018)

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Yaqub', written over a horizontal line.

Date: 04 October 2019

**GRENFELL TOWER
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

**Index to
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Somayya Yaqub**

Exhibit number	Date of Exhibit	Description	FORT number	URN
SY/01	13 July 2012	Safety Champions Quarterly Review Meeting	FORT00507988	
SY/02	Undated	SY's job description as Interim CHSM	To be uploaded via Egress	
SY/03	November / December 2015	GM's handover document	FORT04590365	
SY/04	2016-2017	Extract from Corporate health and safety organogram re 2016 - 2017	FORT04780070	
SY/05	06 June 2016	Handwritten notes by SY	To be uploaded via Egress	
SY/06	22 June 2016	Handwritten notes by SY re meeting with JW	To be uploaded via Egress	
SY/07a	23 January 2017	JW's email to SY forwarding TMO's fire policy and strategy	FORT03476267	
SY/07b	January 2017	TMO fire safety strategy updated draft Jan 2017	FORT03476268	
SY/07c	Undated	TMO fire safety strategy (undated)	FORT03476269	

