

Investigation into the issues raised by Cllr Blakeman in her e-mail dated 18 October 2015

1. Allegations of “Bullying” and “Intimidation” by Rydon’s Operatives

I can confirm Simon Lawrence of Rydon did give a commitment to investigate any specific complaint made about Rydon operatives “bullying” or “intimidating” residents and that commitment remains. However, Cllr Blakeman is not correct that either Rydon or KCTMO have refused to investigate such issues.

We have communicated to residents the process for reporting complaints and have reiterated this in the latest newsletter (October 15 edition). It is reasonable to expect that residents provide specific details of such serious allegations so that they can be properly investigated and resolved

This process details that complaints should be made direct to Rydon in the first instance and will be dealt with through their complaints process. In addition to this, residents can use the KCTMO complaints procedure if they do not feel that their complaints to Rydon have been resolved in a satisfactory manner. In reviewing this I can confirm this is an appropriate approach and is consistent with the information that has been communicated to residents and with the KCTMO Complaints Policy.

At the Grenfell Compact Meeting on 7th October Mr Thompson of 52 Grenfell Tower stated that he had made two complaints to Rydon. I have investigated this matter and can confirm that Rydon considered the issues and responded verbally to Mr Thompson. I am satisfied with Rydon’s action in these instances and I have written to Mr Thompson to confirm this and to ask whether he requires any further action.

In conclusion I would confirm that Cllr Blakeman’s suggestion that either Rydon or KCTMO have refused to investigate complaints is not correct. Issues that have been raised have been investigated and responded to. There is a clear process for any resident to raise a complaint and it will be dealt with in accordance with the KCTMO Complaints Procedure. If any resident has a specific complaint that they want to raise then they should provide the specific details and it will be considered in accordance with our policy.

2. Location of the HIU

I do not agree that residents or ward councillors have been misled in relation to the location of the HIU.

At no time have Rydon or KCTMO given residents an “either / or” offer of locating the unit in the kitchen or the hallway. As part of the detailed design of the works, we changed the proposed location from the kitchen to the hallway based on the practicalities of carrying out those works to homes with residents in occupation.

The original consultant design indicated that the HIU would be located in the kitchen. The contractors priced for this as part of the tender. However, at tender stage, contractors have only limited access to the building and a significant amount of the design risk remains with the client.

Post tender, design responsibility for the project passes to the Main Contractor. Rydon carried out detailed surveys of all of the kitchens in the building and built a detailed understanding of the challenge that the various layouts and designs posed. They were also able to carry out invasive work to expose pipework and isolation valves and to understand the risk associated with working on a system in its current condition.

As part of the detailed design, Rydon highlighted the risks and constraints of locating the HIU's in the kitchen location which included:

- Rydon would have to work on a live system with hot water under pressure and the risk of leaks.
- The isolation valves on the existing system are old and unreliable and their failure could result in flooding
- It would not be possible to maintain hot and cold water supplies to occupied properties while the work is being undertaken
- Invasive works would be required to kitchens to complete the works
- Access to the HIU would have to be maintained in future for ongoing maintenance

Rydon therefore recommended that the hallway was a more appropriate location for the unit as we could:

- maintain heating, and hot and cold water supplies throughout the installation period
- minimise the need for invasive work to the kitchens, bathrooms and toilets of these homes
- access to the HIU for future maintenance would be simplified

This was proposed to our consultant team and agreed with the KCTMO client.

Cllr Blakeman is not correct when she suggests that residents were not consulted on the change of plan relating to the location of the HIU.

We wrote to all residents in our newsletter on December 2014 (Copy Attached) and invited them to a drop in session on 22nd December 2014 and again in the January 2015 newsletter (copy attached) inviting them to a drop in session on 29th January 2015. In each of these newsletters we stated the following:

"Come along to our drop-in consultation session from 3pm to 5pm on [29 January] in Flat 145. We'll show you the proposed layout of the new pipes, radiators and heat interface unit (the main point of control for the new system). This layout has changed from the one shown before because the new heat interface unit will now be in a different place. It has been changed so as not to interfere with the existing layout in your kitchen."

We have therefore communicated to residents that there is a change in the proposed location of the HIU and given residents an opportunity to meet with us, at the drop in sessions to discuss this matter. This was a communication, not a "consultation", however, as we did not consider that it was a viable option to leave residents in 110 households without heating and hot and cold water services for extended periods of time.

We also carried out individual discussions with residents in their homes, explaining the detail of the proposed work and how it related the specific needs of the resident and their home.

We had a further drop-in session on 11th June 2015 to show residents the show flat, including the proposed location of the HIU in the hallway. We listened to residents' feedback about the aesthetics of the HIU and have offered to enclose it in a cupboard. This was communicated to residents at a subsequent drop-in session and via the newsletter in June 2015 (copy attached).

When we met residents in July 2015 with Victoria Borwick (Cllr & MP) we agreed to offer a kitchen installation on condition that those residents agree in writing to the high of disruption that this will cause, including:

- Access being granted for 5 consecutive days
- No heating or hot water supply for the duration of the works
- Kitchen units and fittings being moved
- Ducting to be installed at high level in the bathroom and toilet

It was also agreed at this meeting that:

- The priority is to get all residents onto the new heating system as quickly as possible.
- We will review the option for relocating HIU's from the hallway to the kitchen when all the works are complete.

We are keeping a record of residents with HIU's located in the hallway and a small number of residents have told us to date that they would like this to happen. We currently propose to get feedback from all residents as part of the post work resident satisfaction survey when we will be able to full understand the number of residents who would prefer the HIU to be moved and we can therefore understand the cost of carrying out this additional work.

The pilot HIU installation in the kitchen location resulted in the failure of one of the isolation valves and resulted in a significant leak of hot water under pressure. Because of this incident, the approach was changed and we now require the contractor to drain down the hot water system for the entire block on a daily basis for the duration of the isolation work. There is a cost to this work and there is significant and continued inconvenience to residents.

We acknowledge that the practicalities of installing the HIU in the kitchen were not fully explored at the initial design stage. This was partly because the contractor was not selected at that stage and was not able to add their experience of delivering this type of work while maintaining key services for residents still in occupation.

Having reviewed the process and information I do not agree that councillors and residents have been misled here. However, changes have been made to the proposed work in the context of some practical considerations about ensuring that residents have reasonable access to hot water and heating service over the duration of the works.

In summary, having reviewed the issues raised by Cllr Blakeman in relation to the location of the HIU I can confirm the following:

- The original design did offer the HIU in the kitchen
- Once we had the contractor (Rydon's) in place and carried out detailed design work I can confirm that KCTMO made the decision to change the location to the hallway based on a detailed assessment of the technical and practical constraints
- We did not offer an "either / or" choice of a kitchen or bathroom location to residents until the meeting with Victoria Borwick where we agreed to offer the kitchen location on a number of conditions.
- We have communicated our position to residents and given them opportunities to meet with us to discuss the matter.
- As agreed at the meeting with Victoria Borwick, we will review the option of relocating HIUs from the hallway to the kitchen at the end of the contract when we understand the number of homes and the cost of this work
- We have a legal obligation to provide residents with hot water and heating services. Residents have a legal obligation to give access to complete essential works. I can confirm if some people refuse to be connected or give access we will have to review the position with RBKC about what action would have to be taken

3. Changes in Floor numbering

The proposed changes in floor numbering were initially communicated to residents in the newsletter of February 2015 (copy attached) and subsequently in the April 2015 newsletter (copy attached).

In our April 2015 newsletter we reported the following:

"2. Postal addresses

When the new flats in the lower floors are finished they will need postal addresses.

We've applied for these from the Council, who are liaising with Royal Mail.

The Royal Mail requires the lower floors to be numbered, in case the emergency services need to visit. This means that all the floors will have to be re-numbered and temporary signage will be installed until the final version is available. While it does not affect your address, we apologise for any difficulties this may cause."

This clearly states that we were working with the Council (Planners) who were in liaison with Royal Mail about the numbering of the new flats and the floor numbering. This gives an explanation of the respective roles of KCTMO, the Council and Royal Mail in this matter. It was the Council Planners who informed us that the floors should be numbered in the way we have now implemented. We have taken the planner's advice in good faith and acted on it. I do not agree that residents or councillors have been misled as Cllr Blakeman suggests.

The new floor numbering went live in May 2015 when the lift service was reinstated following the creation of the additional lift stops at the new levels 1, 2 and 3.

Residents have been using the new numbering since this date and we have not received any correspondence or complaints until the matter was raised by Mr Collins in August 2015.

In conclusion

- The information that we have given to residents and councillors on this matter has been accurate and information we have provided has not been misleading
- We have taken the advice of Planners in good faith and have acted on this recommendation accordingly.
- We have communicated the proposed change of numbering to residents well in advance and did not receive any feedback until after the implementation.

4. Programme of Works

At Scrutiny Committee on 15th September the following was reported and these notes are taken from the report:

“7.1 The programme for refurbishment of the tower continues and the estimated completion is the end of October 2015 as reported to the July 2015 committee. However, a steelwork sub-contractor has recently gone into liquidation which has caused a delay in the progress of works to the communal entrance to the block. The impact of this on the overall programme is currently being assessed and it may result in an extension of the completion date.”

“7.7 An additional piece of work is currently being priced and programmed to complete the environmental works and installation of play equipment that was omitted from the KALC project because of its close proximity to the Grenfell Tower site. This work would be in addition to the current approved contract sum and the works would be programmed at the end of the current contract period.”

At the Grenfell Compact Meeting on 7th October, we explained that there has been some delay to the programme relating to two of Rydon’s subcontractors going into liquidation.

We explained that we are working with Rydon and our consultants to agree a revised programme and we gave an indication that we anticipated that the current indication is that the majority of work will be complete by the end of the calendar year with part of the Hidden Home work running into the new year along with the landscaping work which is an addition to the contract.

In our latest newsletter to residents we have reported the following:

“4. Programme

Work in the new entrance hall has been delayed because the steelwork sub-contractor has gone out of business. We are working to minimise the impact on the overall programme and completion date. Once we know the exact impact on the timetable, we will let you know.”

We have now received a detailed programme from Rydon and will be reviewing this with the consultant team. Once we are confident that we have a programme that can be delivered, we will be communicating this to residents at the next Compact Meeting and in our next newsletter.

In conclusion I can confirm having reviewed this matter we have been consistent both at Scrutiny and in our communication with the residents at the Compact meeting and in our newsletters about the completion dates. We are working hard to keep residents informed in a changing environment and are giving them the best information we have available.

5. CCTV

CCTV will be reinstated in the communal entrance on completion of the works.

Following questions from residents at the Grenfell Compact Meeting on 7th October, Kiran Singh has reviewed the CCTV system and has confirmed to residents that the remaining cameras are in operation.

We will do all we can to address concerns around security and will again discuss this at the next compact meeting

6. Making Good Work

In reviewing this I can confirm that in all our communication we have explained to residents that the new radiators are smaller than the previous one used. We have therefore given residents the choice of having either:

- the radiators mounted on a painted backboard that will cover the area affected, or
- having a redecoration allowance of £50

We have said that if any residents have any specific issues that will not be reasonably covered by these options, then they should contact Rydon's RLO in the first instance and we will consider an appropriate response. I can confirm this is still an offer open to the residents

As the dimensions, operation and configuration of the new windows is different to the old ones, some residents will find that their blinds or curtains will not fit. We have asked residents to discuss their specific needs with Rydon in the first instance and they will look at adjustments that will help overcome the issue.

If it is not possible to work around the issue, then we will consider an appropriate response on a case by case basis.

If residents are not satisfied with the response they receive from Rydon, then residents can escalate the matter to KCTMO through the Project Manager or the Complaints Procedure.

Having reviewed this matter I can confirm we have been consistent in offering to resolve individual cases to bring these matter to a close and that offer still remains. We would encourage you to redirect any resident complaining about this to contact either Rydon's or KCTMO

7. Disturbance Allowances

It is not our policy to pay “disturbance payments” to residents as part of the refurbishment of their homes and I can confirm that RBKC has no legal requirement to do so.

We recognise the disruption to residents of Grenfell Tower associated with the refurbishment of their homes. We have offered respite facilities to residents and aim to complete the works as quickly as possible, while managing the disruption caused.

It is worth noting that the period that work carried out inside residents’ homes is actually quite short and is significantly less than in properties where we are carrying out kitchen, bathroom and electrical works with residents in occupation in other parts of the KCTMO Capital Programme.

As you are aware, we do not have the level of funding required to carry out all investment work that is necessary to homes in the borough and there is likely to be further pressure on resources as current policies are implemented. Any “disturbance payment” made to residents would have a direct impact on our ability to carry out other essential works to residents homes.

In conclusion we accept the work has caused disturbance and we have sought at Grenfell Tower and other areas where we are carrying our programmes of work to offer facilities for respite and to keep the work in homes to a minimum. This work which provided new windows, new heating systems and cladding which will improve substantially the living condition in the tower and reduce heating bills overall as well as reducing noise

I can confirm that KCTMO and RBKC have no legal obligation to provide disturbance allowances