16 July 2015

Dear Grenfell Tower Resident

We are writing to report back to you on the meeting held last Saturday with residents of Grenfell Tower, Peter Maddison (Assets and Regeneration Director of the TMO) and Simon Lawrence of Rydon. The meeting was facilitated by ourselves, Councillors Robert Atkinson and Judith Blakeman and was very well attended. The issues raised were as follows:

The siting of the HIU boiler unit

Residents present all wished to have the unit installed in their kitchen. The TMO and Rydon said this would take much longer, cost more, create massive disruption inside the flats, require more pipework, the removal of the kitchen wall and some kitchen units and cutting off water for at least two days for all the flats served by a particular water riser. The boiler must also be accessible for the annual check, so could not, for example, be tiled over. Residents said that nevertheless they would prefer the greater disruption to have the unit in the kitchen.

It was acknowledged that there had been no proper consultation on the changed decision not to offer the kitchen option, although it had been offered at the start of the refurbishment programme.

Electrical safety

Residents were worried that the boiler installation was too close to the fuse box and would be dangerous. The TMO said the drain will be connected to the bath and be will separated from the fuse box. These works will be signed off by an independent electrical contractor and then approved by the Council's building control department. The boiler installation will be in accordance with current regulations, however, residents wished the works to be done in accordance with best practice rather than the minimum set out in the regulations.

The TMO undertook to commission an independent assessment of these proposed works to be made available to all residents.

Pipework

The TMO and Rydon stated that open pipework at floor level would be no hotter that the radiators they serve. Residents were not convinced and were also concerned that open pipework would spoil the look of their homes. They were strongly of the view that pipes should be boxed in, whether at floor or at ceiling level.

Access to the flat

Residents felt access to the flat would be obstructed by the hallway installation. The TMO said that the front door is the narrowest part of the hallway and the boiler would be flush with the wall, so there should be no problem getting large items, such as furniture and bicycles into the flat.

Security

Residents were concerned that the security officer had been lost. As he was supposed to serve the whole estate this was not justifiable. He could have been given a table at the walkway entrance to the Tower. Several break-ins had been reported but not acted on. It was disgraceful that the door had been out of action for so long. Residents felt insecure and had been insulted by notices put up suggesting that intrusions into the Tower were their fault. The TMO said that the front door was almost beyond repair but had to be used as an interim measure.

General everyday working

Residents pointed out that communal areas and the lifts are dirty, not cleaned as works go along and not cleaned at the end of the day. Lifts are often said to be out of order, yet Rydon appear able to use them at will. Rydon

denied that they have a key to the lift and have the same usage as residents. Residents made the point strongly that this is their home and the Tower should not be treated as a building site.

Individual matters

The TMO stressed the need to discuss the detailed implications of how the works can be carried out in each flat individually with residents, owing to different circumstances in each flat. Refusing to allow them in is not helpful. Residents made strong points about the TMO and Rydon giving conflicting information and misleading different householders. They objected to being "picked off" individually. Some Rydon workers were being very aggressive and threatening towards them.

Complaints

Although Rydon are available to receive complaints, the TMO is not and it is difficult to raise issues with them. The TMO out-of-hours service is a disaster. Residents have reported on many occasions when lifts are not working, without response. When the water was turned off, no water bottles or other arrangement was offered to affected households. There is a need for both the TMO and Rydon to treat residents with proper respect, engage with them properly and apologise when an apology is justified. Mr. Maddison said he was at the meeting to apologise on behalf of the TMO when services are not working or things go wrong.

Redecoration

Rydon are not contracted to redecorate flats after the works have been done. Residents will be offered a redecoration allowance.

Timeframe

The TMO said that works are on track to finish by October when the heating systems are turned on and all the new installations have to be tested before this can happen. It is therefore critical to get the works agreed and delivered as quickly as possible. The TMO believe the location of the boiler in the hallway is an acceptable compromise. Residents disagreed and felt that this was purely to save money.

Action

After the meeting we wrote to ask the TMO to reflect seriously on the following points:

- The need to keep residents properly informed and not to give conflicting information
- That a mixture of individual and group meetings may be a preferable way to do this
- That the pipework at floor level should also be boxed in and more thought be given to improving the aesthetics at both floor and ceiling level
- Rydon to ensure that communal areas and lifts are kept as clean as possible during the day and properly cleaned at the end of each day
- Rydon to address the attitude of some of their staff towards residents
- Finally, the wish of so many residents to have the boiler installed in the kitchen must be given very, very serious consideration.

Victoria Borwick MP is visiting Grenfell Tower on Friday 17 July and she has been given a copy of this letter. Unfortunately we do not have the resources to circulate it to every household prior to her visit.

Kind regards

Councillors Robert Atkinson and Judith Blakeman
Notting Dale Ward

NB Please note that our councillors' surgeries are held on the second and fourth Saturday of every Month (except the second Saturday in August and December) from 10 am to 12 noon in the meeting room at the new Kensington Leisure Centre for any resident who wishes to come and talk to us.