I Richard Fletcher, formerly of Flat 131 on the 16th Floor of Grenfell Tower will say as follows:-

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a core participant in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and a survivor from the dreadful fire on 14 June 2017.

2. I make this statement on behalf of myself and my daughter [REDACTED]. My wife Hime Haymanot Gashaw AKA Haymanot Gashaw, who is the mother of our daughter [REDACTED], has made her own witness statement on her own behalf as well as also on behalf of our daughter. I was 42 years old at the time of the fire and my daughter was [6] years old.

3. I have made a statement to the Metropolitan Police and I confirm that I consent to any police statement I have made being disclosed to the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.

4. Hime and [REDACTED] are the most important people in my life.

5. I lived in flat 131 on the 16th floor of Grenfell Tower for approximately 16 years up until the time of the fire. It was a one-bedroom flat and I and my wife had converted the storage area...

Richard FLETCHER
in the flat into a bedroom for our young daughter. I lived there with my wife and our
daughter who has lived there for her whole life.

6. Prior to the fire we had a happy normal life with my wife and I both working and our
daughter going to school. I work shift work and my wife works more normal hours. Our
daughter who is now 8, goes to school.

7. This statement is mainly about our experiences on 14 June 2017 and deals with what the
Inquiry have called ‘Phase 1’ matters, setting out what happened to us when the fire broke
out and consumed Grenfell Tower, my family’s home. I will provide greater detail of ‘Phase
2’ matters as the Inquiry progresses although I will set out some brief details of what are
Phase 2 matters later in this statement although I will do so without having seen the
disclosure of the documentation that is anticipated will be given for Phase 2 and in particular
without sight of my housing file from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
(‘RBKC’).

8. The 14 June 2017 is a day my family will never forget. We lost everything we owned and
had gathered over the years. We lost our home. Amazingly, and thankfully we survived
although we nearly perished in the fire along with many others. This is what happened to us,
in my words.

THE EVENING OF 13 JUNE 2017

9. During the evening and night before the morning of the fire I was at home with my wife and
daughter. Earlier in the evening we had all been watching tv together but later my daughter
went to bed at about 8pm which is her normal time. My wife and I carried on watching tv
together. As I was not on a shift to work the next day, I work with [REDACTED] I decided to
stay up watching tv. With cruel irony I was watching a film called ‘Man on Fire’. Up until
this point it had just been like any other evening and we could not have imagined in our
worst nightmares what was to come in a matter of hours.

Richard FLETCHER
10. My wife and I continued watching TV together until approximately 10pm when my wife went to bed and I carried on watching the movie on TV.

11. Whilst watching TV I heard a fire engine arriving outside the Tower followed by a second engine. The fire engine sirens were sounding which I could hear. This was at some time approaching 1 pm. My first reaction was that I thought someone had got stuck in the lift. It was not unusual for the fire brigade to come to the Tower due to someone getting stuck in the lift. However, I then heard a third fire engine approaching the Tower, which did seem a lot of engines for a person getting stuck in the lift.

12. I opened the window in the living room and looked out and could see directly below me three fire engines. There was no smoke that I could see. There were no flames. Therefore, I assumed that my initial thoughts were correct and that the commotion was simply because someone was stuck in the lift.

13. Then a fourth fire engine arrived. As I did not see any smoke or anything else that would have caused me to be worried, I closed the kitchen window and went to bed. I am not sure what time I went to bed but I would estimate it was around 1 to 1.15 am. At the time of going to bed I still thought it was the lift that was the cause of all the fire engines being outside the Tower, as I had not seen any smoke, and nobody was telling us to leave.

14. Therefore, I went to bed just after fire brigade arrived. Once I had got into bed it took me up to 15 minutes to fall asleep. But very shortly after, at about 1.30 am I was woken up not by the sound of a smoke alarm but by a popping sound. In the background I thought I could hear something going 'pop, pop, pop'. I did not know if the sound was part of a dream I had just or if it was real. Naturally I was very drowsy having just fallen into sleep. It must be appreciated that when the fire started it was the early hours of the morning and most people had already fallen asleep, so when they woke up they were still not with it and were disorientated. Despite not really knowing what was going on something told me to get up and have a look outside, which luckily, I did.

Richard FLETCHER
THE MORNING OF 14 JUNE 2017

15. I understand from information since provided to me and which has been spoken about in the media that the fire started at 00:54 of the morning of 14 June 2017 on the 4th floor of Grenfell Tower. I do not know exactly when I got out of bed to see what the popping noise was, but clearly it must have been after the fire had started and was certainly after the first four fire engines had arrived.

16. Having woken up to the sound of popping, I looked out of the bedroom window to see what was going on. I turned the blinds and looked to up and to the left and saw an orange line, what I would describe as a long orange streak about 30 to 40 meters long, going down the side of the building. It was not flashing, and I couldn’t tell what it was. It looked like a firework, or the end streak part of a firework trail.

17. I woke up my wife and asked her to also look at it. We both stared at it from the bedroom window but couldn’t see what it was.

18. We moved to the kitchen to look out the kitchen window to see if we could get a better view as this was closer to where the light was, but we still couldn’t see what it was. So we moved to the living room which was right next to the orange light. I opened the main blind in the living room and saw fire along the whole length of the building from the 19th floor down to the bottom of the Tower.

19. The penny then dropped as we were looking out of the living room window. It was obvious we were in very serious danger.

20. My wife ran to the front door with me behind her and she opened the front door. As she opened the front door thick black smoke rushed in from the hallway/landing outside of the flat. The smoke in the landing area covered the whole area from the floor to the ceiling. It was thick black smoke and you could not see anything. Even if you held up your hand in front of your face you couldn’t see it as it was so black and thick. I am 6 ft tall and the thick

Richard FLETCHER
black smoke was above my head. I could not see any lights in the hallway; they must have been out or at best prevented from giving out light by the thickness of the smoke. Hime slammed the door shut.

21. I did not hear the sound of any smoke alarms.

22. My wife and I walked back into the living room. We did not turn the lights on. It was dark and the room was now smoke filled but the flame from outside was illuminating the flat, so we could see each other.

23. This was the first time my wife did not know what to say. We both realised that we were trapped.

24. Millions of thoughts went through my mind. I realised it was too high to jump out. I thought we were trapped with no way out and that we were going to die. It was a terrible feeling and realisation.

25. These thoughts went through my mind in a split second and at this time my daughter was still asleep in our bed. I realised that the fire was coming from the back of the flat i.e. from the window in the living room as well as from the front door. I believed that there was no way to get out and no point in trying to escape as it was hopeless. I felt that the kindest thing would be to leave our daughter to continue sleeping, rather than waking her up to die in pain and suffering the terror of the fire. At this point our daughter was still asleep and did not know what was going on. She had fallen asleep with in our bed that evening. Momentarily I thought the best thing to do was to climb back into bed with our daughter with my wife and me on either side of our daughter to cuddle up with her and let the smoke and fire take us. By letting her sleep it would mean that the last moments of her life would not involve her screaming in terror. I thought it was better and kinder that we let her continue to sleep and die quietly. I did not want her to wake and be in pain and for her last minutes to be moments of terror.

Richard FLETCHER
26. However, about ten seconds later, I seemed to shock myself back into fighting mode. I thought my daughter is only six years old and she has not seen enough of the world. How unfair would it be for her to go now? It pains me even now to think that I was so desperate and felt the situation was so hopeless that such thoughts had crossed my mind.

27. Once I had decided we had to do something my mind again started considering all options. I thought for a few seconds about tying the sheets together to make a rope to escape but realised that it wasn’t going to work as it was not feasible as we were so high and there was fire everywhere on the outside of the building. My attitude was now that we had to survive and that my daughter had to live her life. There was an incredible energy in me and a determination to save my family.

28. My wife looked at me and said, “we need to get out”. I felt she was looking to me to work it out. She looked at me looking for an answer and she asked me “what’s the plan?”

29. In that five second period I tried to figure out what we were going to do. I realised that we didn’t have long since the fire was coming from two places and all our exits were blocked. We knew that nobody was coming and realised we had to figure this out for ourselves.

30. I have had lots of fire training through work –[redacted], which is why I did not freak out. Within that brief time, I was considering our options and what we could do. As I have said, I had considered us jumping but knew as we were on the 16th floor we could not as we would not survive from that height. I even thought about building a parachute and us jumping out of the window. I thought about trying to cool down the flat by flooding it. This is how desperate we were. Basically, I was trying to figure out the safest way to get out and down from the Tower.

31. My wife was walking around the living room. I grabbed the things that I believed we would need to take with us: wallet (in case we had to get a hotel), keys (for the car so we could drive if we got out) and my phone (so that we could call people and let them know we were ok).

Richard FLETCHER
32. I honestly thought though that we were facing death. Looking back on it now, I am amazed at just how logically I was thinking. I am used to problem solving in my work. My wife has since told me that if I had not been there she would have stayed in the flat. I shudder when I think about that.

33. We had no shoes on and were just wearing our pyjamas/shorts and were barefoot.

34. We did not know if the fire was at the front door. When we had opened the front door before we had seen lots of thick black smoke but no flames. Therefore, we thought there was a chance of getting out and down the stairs. Irrespective of whether there was fire there or not, we knew that down the stairs was our only chance.

35. My wife went to the bedroom and grabbed L[4] from our bed and carried her to the flat front door. Before we opened the door, we prepared ourselves. I was at the front and my wife was behind me holding our daughter.

36. I grabbed my wife’s hand and said to her “we are not separating for anything. If one of us falls, we all fall. Do not let go of my hand. Whatever happens don’t let go of me. We get out together or we die together”.

37. I told my wife to keep her head as low as possible where the air was clearer.

We left and crouched down low and took about three steps. We were immediately in thick black smoke and apart from what seemed to be a phone light ahead of us we could not see anything. We then heard our neighbour (a Turkish man) who was holding the phone with the light and told him there was a fire and he should get out. He had opened the door to his flat and I shouted at him “fire, fire, fire. Get out”. He went back in to his flat and slammed shut the door. He lived in flat 133. I could not believe that he went back in.
38. We navigated to the fire exit door on the communal lobby landing and went out the emergency fire exit and started down the stairs. We made it to the stairwell but could not see anything until we got on to the stairwell.

39. I would estimate that we entered the stairwell sometime between 1:20 and 1:25 am. It took us between 5 and 10 minutes to get down the stairs. We would have had to negotiate 32 flights of stairs. Although we were trying to get down quickly we were picking our footing carefully as we did not want to fall and I was carrying my daughter so was naturally slowed down and was careful with her. I had taken my daughter from my wife as she was too heavy for my wife to continue to carry.

40. At the time that we were descending there was no smoke on the stairwell. It was silent. The stairwell lights were on. I believe the popping sounds that I had heard whilst in the flat were coming from the cladding and the windows.

41. Although there was no smoke at that time when we were coming down the stairs we certainly could feel the heat of the fire. It was uncomfortable and worrying.

42. I have asked myself how did the thick black smoke get onto the landing/hallway of the 16th floor when there was no smoke in the stairwell? It must have come in through windows or vents on the landing. It could not have come up or down the stairs at that time as the fire exit stairs were clear of any smoke.

43. I am convinced that if we had delayed only 2 minutes it would have been worse for us. We were very lucky.

44. The whole thing felt like it was surreal, like being on a disaster movie set. However, tragedy was unfurling, and people were dying.

45. My daughter is heavy, so I took her from my wife who was carrying her up until this point. There was smoke coming downwards from the higher floors and coming up from the lower

Richard FLETCHER
floors due to people opening the fire doors, which was letting the smoke through. However, the smoke was not so thick that it was not possible to see. As we came out of our flat, the communal landing directly outside our flat was engulfed in smoke and you could not see anything.

46. As we went out onto the stairwell through the fire exit door from our landing the smoke was not as thick. Once we were on the stairwell I could see smoke coming from above as people opened fire doors above on the higher levels.

47. As people were coming out of their landings from both above and below and were trying to escape, they opened the fire doors onto the stairwells, causing the smoke to spread. I was checking for the smoke above and below us. When we initially reached the stairwell, we looked around us both up and down on the stairwell and we could only see smoke above us. As we proceeded down the stairs, people were opening the fire exits on their floors which meant more smoke was coming into where we were on the stairwell. The fire doors on the landing were opening with people opening them and there were a few people on the stairwell. By stairwells I mean the stairs between each floor that we were descending.

48. I was talking to my wife trying to keep us calm. I said we should try and get as far down the Tower as possible to the lowest floor of the Tower as possible and if we then got trapped by fire we would get off the stairwell at that floor to find a window and jump.

49. I knew that we lived on the 16th floor but that the numbering was incorrect on the stairs. My floor had originally been the 13th floor (hence my flat number starting ‘13’ with one of the 6 flats on each floor then making up the third final number of the address. Therefore, I took this into consideration when planning our escape. It should be noted that some of the floor level numbering was simply painted on the wall. Therefore, I was counting the floors as we went down.
50. It was eerily silent as we went down the levels using the stairs. There was hardly anyone on 
the stairwell as we moved down from our floor. However, we did pass a man called Mr Shah 
and another person (who I did not know).

51. Mr Shah was on about the 4th floor. He was crying and saying about his flat being destroyed. 
I remember my wife and me joking about that despite everything. Throughout the whole 
ordeal my wife and I retained our humour despite the possibility of everything that we knew 
could happen to us. It kept us going during our escape.

52. I think one man passed us on his way up the tower, saying that he was going to go upwards 
in the Tower; presumably he felt that this was the best course of action to avoid the fire. I did 
not recognise this man heading upstairs. I cannot remember if he said anything to me, but I 
assume that he was heading upwards to try and escape from the fire below. However, I 
thought that the best chance of escaping and not dying was to keep heading downwards and 
follow our escape plan. Therefore, we kept going downstairs.

53. There was no way we were going to go up away from the only exit in the Tower. I knew that 
we were not going to be rescued from the roof, so we had no choice but to keep going down.

54. When we were on the 6th floor there was smoke below us and I thought this was where we 
were going to have to stop heading down using the stairs and jump from a window. This was 
a terrible thought to have to contemplate when you realise it involves your young child. 
However, after the 6th floor the smoke started to fade slightly, and we were able to continue.

55. As we were going downwards in the Tower, the air became slightly clearer as the smoke was 
coming from above us on the higher floors. Even so, I knew we had to go carefully so we 
didn’t fall. Despite our slow progress I felt that it was important to be careful otherwise if we 
had fallen we may never have gotten up again. We were simply being careful for no other 
reason than I knew that we couldn’t afford to fall and injure ourselves. I know that you can 
make a terrible situation even worse if you panic. If we had fallen down the stairs and

Richard FLETCHER
injured ourselves, this would have made escaping even harder than it was. Simply put, we were just being cautious but still obviously trying to get out as quickly and safely as possible.

56. We could feel the heat in the stairwell.

57. We kept going down until the floor level with the glass lobby staging floor (possibly the 2nd floor) and this was when we saw the firemen. Seeing the firemen and knowing we had made it to that level we then realised that we were going to make it.

58. We encountered the fire fighters at about the first or second floor on the glass staging floor. This was the first time that we saw fire fighters. The firemen didn’t say anything to us. They didn’t even acknowledge us but clearly, they were focussed on going into the fire. They were all busy either about to enter the fire or putting on breathing equipment.

59. At no point did I hear any announcements or calls by the emergency services to get out of the building.

**OUTSIDE THE TOWER**

60. As we reached the exit of the Tower i.e. the main lobby, we saw that the front door was open. From the CCTV still photograph of me carrying my daughter in the lobby and exiting the Tower, I believe that it was 1.31am when we exited the Tower. We could see all the hose pipes were leading into the Tower and towards the fire. We stepped out of the building and felt a wave of relief flow over us. As we were leaving the Tower, we could see the cladding from the outside of the building coming down in flames. It was exploding as it hit the ground. Big burning chunks were raining down the size of table tops. With my usual dark humour, I said to my wife that I couldn’t believe we had survived all of that to only be killed by a piece of cladding falling on us outside of the Tower.
61. I did not want my young daughter to see all this so I asked her to close her eyes and I also covered her eyes with my hands.

62. We moved away from the Tower and walked to the green grass area next to the Sports Centre.

63. There was a crowd of about 50 people watching the fire and recording it on their mobile phones. There were also people that I knew from the Tower and who had escaped looking up at the building.

64. We looked up and could see our flat engulfed in flames. We recognised our flat by the wooden blinds in the window and we knew roughly where it was in relation to the other flats. There was an orange looking line moving across the building, as the fire spread from the right to the left (looking from outside toward the Tower from outside the Sports Centre).

65. My wife became hysterical due to what we had been through and she started to scream. My daughter was now awake having woken up whilst we were coming down the stairs. I told my wife to calm down as I was determined not to spook and upset our daughter any more than necessary. To avoid our daughter suffering or being any more upset, I thought that our main objective, having escaped should be to get us away from the area as quickly and as calmly as possible. We had not parked near the Tower the night before, so we had to walk to our car.

66. On our way to the car, people were asking us if we were ok and how [redacted] was. I told my wife we just had to get away from the area as soon as we could.

67. I heard people screaming “he’s going to jump”. I didn’t look as I didn’t want to see it. I shielded my daughter’s eyes. My wife was also looking up at the Tower on fire and in particular our flat, which was causing her even more distress and upset. Therefore, I said don’t look and said we just had to leave the area as quickly as possible. I knew that I had my car keys, wallet and mobile so we were able to just leave and head to a hotel.

Richard FLETCHER
68. Before we left my wife wanted to call her mum and let her know that we were ok, but she realised that she didn’t have her phone, however, I had mine. So, she called from my phone but there was no answer. Therefore, we changed our plan from going to a hotel to driving straight to her mum’s house.

69. As we drove away from the Tower, at about 1.50am, there were no police around the Tower, just fire fighters. However, as we drove away we passed the police who were literally closing the roads just as we left them. Luckily, as we were just ahead of the closures (by a matter of seconds), we didn’t get caught up in the ‘shut down’ that was happening around us.

70. We drove straight to my mother-in-law’s place. When we arrived there, we went into her home and collapsed, being exhausted. We could see the fire from her home by looking out of the window. We also listened to the radio and watched the tv as well as looking out the window to see what was happening.

71. That night (or should I say morning), my daughter slept in with her grandparents in their bed. My wife and I stayed up, watching the news and looking out the window. My wife wanted to go back to the Tower to see if Helen Gebremeskel and her daughter were ok and to see who else was there. Rime was worried because Helen lived in flat 186 on the 21st floor. However, I said it was best to stay at her mum’s as practically there was nothing we could do.

72. The shock of what had just happened to us then hit us. We all started to cry.

THE EVENTS DIRECTLY AFTER THE FIRE

73. In the days that followed the fire, we remained at my mother-in-law’s home for the Wednesday and the Thursday. We were receiving hundreds of calls from people, even people we had not heard from for years.
Lots of people were coming to the house and were crying. I thought it was better for our daughter to be away from all the drama and be back in a calm secure environment which her school offered.

Our daughter went back to school on the Friday after the fire. The school was amazing in its support for our family after the fire.

We went back to the area of the Tower on Friday 16 June 2017. Our flat looked completely burnt out.

I found out that our Turkish neighbour made it out of the Tower. He said that he saw me when we had left our flat and gone into the smoke-filled landing and he had heard me shout. He said when he opened his own door he was in his underpants and he went back in to his flat to put his trousers on. He said that the delay of 2 minutes in finding and putting on his pants had made it very difficult to get out. He flooded his flat and used wet towels to get out. He was in hospital for 2 days with the effects of smoke inhalation. He told me he had coughed up blood.

Tragically and very sadly, Sheila Smith who was my next-door neighbour, died in the fire.

Joe who was also on my floor died.

A friend of mine, Eddie, on our floor was saved by the fire fighters rescuing him. He told me that when he went into the smoke on the landing he could not find the handle to the fire exit door on to the stairwell. He was trapped and collapsed. By luck fire fighters saw him and brought him out of the Tower.

*HOUSING*

We initially stayed with my mother-in-law. My wife and I slept on the sofa and my daughter slept with her grandparents. The fire continued burning for a couple of days. On the Friday
we took our daughter to school and then made our way to the Westway Centre to provide our
details to the authorities and to register in order to receive support and housing.

81. With regard to housing it has taken a great deal of effort, stress and complaints to finally be
moved out of a hotel. We spent almost a year living in a hotel.

82. It may sound glamorous to be staying in a hotel, but it really is not. A hotel room simply has
a bedroom and a bathroom. They are not designed or expected to be used for living in but
simply for staying in during a short stay to visit somewhere.

83. Even the simplest of things you are not able to do. You couldn’t cook a family meal and sit
down at a table and eat it. Most people who have had to stay in a hotel for even a few weeks
will crave to get home and back to normality, especially if they have children. However, we
were stuck in this nightmare of temporary living. You can’t even put your clothes in to wash.
I remember saying to my solicitor that we had to get our socks dry cleaned.

We were eventually signed a tenancy agreement with RBKC in October 2017. Even though we
signed the tenancy agreement we were not able to move in straight away due to a catalogue of
problems with our new place. This included most worryingly electrical problems including
water pouring down the electric light cable, flooding, mould as well as other issues.

INITIAL SUPPORT

84. In the days following the fire there was no support. Nobody knew anything. RBKC were
clearly making it up as they went along. There was no contingency plan. Once we had
provided our details at the Westway we did not receive any specific support. The help was
mainly coming from donations made by people and organisations outside of RBKC including
the Red Cross.
85. We had been wearing the same clothes for three days. In terms of food, drink, clothes and the essentials we were told by the volunteer help points that had been set up, to take whatever we needed.

86. The relief effort was dotted around the Tower for various things. After visiting the Westway, we were sent to the Rugby Portobello Trust, where we were given accommodation for one night which was a hotel room in the Premiere Inn at Hanger Lane.

87. We were also given food as well as accommodation. The food was in the form of a voucher, which from memory was for use in the hotel. We were also given £50 in cash and asked if that would be enough to get us through the weekend.

88. The hotel we went to was on the Friday night, was a long way from the relief centre. We wanted to be near the school, the relief centre etc. Therefore, we went back to the Rugby Portobello Trust on the Saturday and said that we needed to be closer to the area surrounding the Tower. At the centre there was a long queue of people. They also gave us about £250 in cash. It took about 2 hours to be seen. The same man who gave us the money also told us he had a hotel room in Tara Copthorne in High Street Kensington, which he said it was nice and a premiere room.

89. He told us to make our way there which we did. We packed up our plastic bag and headed to the hotel.

90. We didn’t know how long we would be there or whether we would have to move again. Nobody really knew what was going on. He told us breakfast was included but we didn’t know if other food was included or whether we had to use the £250. There was a serious lack of communication between us and RBKC.

91. The rumours then started that we may have to go and stay in the gym at the Westway. This was from residents saying they had heard people were to be moved out of hotels and into there. This caused even more stress, as even though the hotel was not perfect it was better than our daughter having to sleep on the floor in a gym with hundreds of other people.

Richard FLETCHER
92. We spent the weekend at the hotel and on the Monday my wife went back to work in order to achieve an element of normality that was seriously lacking in our lives.

93. She initially went back to work on a half day basis. Rumours started to circulate about what was available in terms of housing but there was no information coming from the council. It felt like we were in a third world country following a disaster and the authorities were doing nothing.

94. Everyone was walking around the area in the clothes and shoes donated by companies. This meant that you could tell who was from the Tower as they were dressed identically.

THE MONTHS FOLLOWING THE FIRE

In the months following the fire the main issue for us as a family was housing. Nobody knew what was happening and then Teresa May said that everyone would be housed within a certain period of time. The government also said that everyone would receive money. You had to attend a centre and give your details including ID. Luckily, we had ID so attended and then had to go to a post office, whereupon they would transfer a certain amount of money to our bank account.

CONCERNS ABOUT FIRE SAFETY PRIOR TO THE FIRE

95. I had many concerns about fire safety in relation to the Tower prior to the fire. These were mainly raised through Edward Daffyn who was also a resident of the Tower and would often speak on behalf of himself and other residents to RBKC. He was our neighbour and started the Residents Action Group that raised concerns and made complaint to Rydon and the TMO on behalf of residents.

Richard FLETCHER
96. The first issue of concern raised by us through Edward Daffyn was opposition to RBKC’s plans to fit boilers in individual flats just inside the front door of the flats. The boilers were intended to be situated above the electric panel/board. His point and mine was that it was common sense that you do not place a boiler at the only exit of a flat in a Tower block and you don’t put water above electrics.

97. If a boiler were to explode and catch on fire, then it could cause the Tower to catch on fire whilst at the same time blocking the only exit out of a flat. I thought it was a dangerously stupid idea to locate the boiler just inside the entrance door and would not agree to it.

98. I spoke directly with Rydon about this. I spoke to the Customer Service lady, but I do not remember her name, but I can describe her. She was a middle aged English lady with blond hair. It was commonly known that Rydon and RBKC had threatened residents with eviction if they would not agree to the boiler being inside the front door of flats. I made it clear to Rydon that there was no way that I was having a boiler at my front door. I specifically said that if there was a fire we would have to run into it. I made it plain I was not letting them in to my flat to carry out the boiler installation they intended to do.

99. Further, there were two issues with the central heating pipes.

100. Firstly, they wished to run the water pipes for the central heating along the floor in our flat. Our concern was that these were hot water pipes carrying boiling water. They refused to confirm that the piping would be boxed in. As parents, our concern was that our daughter - who was five at the time - could be severely burnt on them. In the end they ran the pipes along the ceiling as we had suggested. However, they had still simply run the pipes through two holes they made above the front door. Our concern was that if the pipe burst there would be streaming hot water coming down preventing our exit/escape.

101. Secondly, we had concerns as to whether the smoke alarms in the hallway of the lobby near the communal lift worked. I asked the lady who worked in the Customer Service Lobby Richard FLETCHER
(the same lady I described above) and she informed me that they did work. This was an oral conversation towards the end of the refurbishments.

102. In addition to these two concerns, my wife and I had a further concern when about two months prior to the fire, signs were put up next to the lifts by RBKC/TMO stating that in the event of a fire, residents should stay in their flat. I have mentioned this briefly above in this statement. I remember saying to my wife that if there was a fire we would just ignore such stupid advice and leave. Such a belief was based on common sense that the best action would be to try and escape. The fact that we had this discussion shortly before the fire probably ensured that we left our flat when we did rather than discussing what to do at the time of the fire itself. We had already agreed to ignore the sign. If we hadn’t discussed it prior to the fire, then we may not have left when we did. This was in part from speaking to Edward.

**CONCERNS ABOUT MODIFICATIONS TO THE TOWER**

103. Following the modifications undertaken on the Tower we had some concerns but mainly we expected that any works would have been carried out to a professional and safe standard. Clearly, we were wrong on all counts.

104. As I have said mentioned above, we were concerned about the boilers, but we were also concerned about the piping that had been installed as part of the central heating system. The piping was not boxed in but simply ran along the floor. As we have a young child we were concerned that our daughter could be burnt on the pipes if she were to touch them.

105. We raised these concerns with RBKC and Rydon moving the boiler from the front door to the airing cupboard. Their initial response was they would not make them safe. This was said to all of the residents generally. The communication was not by specific email but by word of mouth. We refused to let them undertake the work and Rydon said they would take us to court if we did not consent. This was said to all the tenants generally. The matter went back and forth but eventually they gave in to us. We were not the only people refusing to let

Richard FLETCHER
them undertake the work. About twenty other residents were saying the same thing about the boiler and pipes. My view was that Rydon would not really want to take twenty residents to court over the piping. This attitude to the residents on this occasion was indicative of the attitude generally towards us. Nobody listened to us but simply told us what was going to happen.

106. I also recall discussing with Eddie about a proposal by Rydon to run gas pipes along the staircases following them all the way down. Eddie pointed out to me that this was crazy as the stairs were our only escape route and to have gas pipes carrying flammable gas would be a death trap.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

107. I would like to make a number of other comments regarding my knowledge of various matters relating to Grenfell Tower, which I believe maybe relevant at this stage.

*Stay Put Policy*

108. When we moved into Grenfell Tower about ten years ago as tenants the flat required decorating. On moving in we were not given any information by anyone regarding fire safety or at any time after moving in. I was not aware of the fire brigade carrying out any checks at any time.

109. With regard to what we should do in the event of a fire, I was aware of there being a sticker next to the lift saying that in the event of a fire, residents should ‘stay put’. However, my wife and I had spoken about the ‘stay put’ sign by the lift and agreed that it was ridiculous and that we had said if there was a fire we would ignore it. As we had had this discussion prior to the fire, it probably saved our lives as we didn’t waste time discussing if it was safer to follow this policy or just try and get out. Common sense told us that we were so high up and the flat would soon be ablaze that we had to escape.

Richard FLETCHER
Alarms

110. We believed that there was a fire alarm system in Grenfell Tower since RBKC had spent £10m on refurbishments and so assumed that any responsible council would include such a system.

111. We had a smoke alarm in our kitchen and possibly in our hallway, but I do not know if they were linked together or who fitted them. Nobody ever came to check them. I believe that none of the smoke alarms went off on the night of the fire and it was the sound of popping which I believe came from the burning cladding that woke me.

112. It was only when we were leaving the flat and opened the door that I believe the fire alarm went off in our flat. I do not remember the smoke alarm going off in our flat.

Doors

113. I would mention that the automatic closer on our front door had broken a couple of months before the fire. RBKC came and removed it due to us reporting it being broken but they did not replace it resulting in us not having one on the night of the fire. This was the door that RBKC had replaced previously when they carried out the refurbishments. The new door had a glass window whereas the old door didn’t. The letter box on the new door would spring shut as required and did not stick.

114. Inside the flat the bathroom door would not close as it was swollen.

Power surges

115. The other problem we encountered with the flat prior to the fire was in approximately 2016, when there was a power surge. This caused a power cut and after that when RBKC were trying to rectify the problem there was a great deal of confusion as to where the fuse...
boxes were and whose flat was linked to which box. The electricity board came a number of
times to check the electrics and to try and establish which power unit was which, but I do not
remember when or any further details.

116. My wife wrote to EON on about 10 occasions about the power surges. She has the
e-mails she wrote.

Extractor fan

117. There was an extractor fan in both the bathroom and the kitchen. Due to the extractor fan
not being installed correctly there used to be a draught which came through it.

Lifts

118. There were 2 lifts serving the 23 floors of flats. At least one lift would often not be
working and they would be repaired within approximately a few days to a week.

Miscellaneous

119. The lighting in the hallways worked more often than not.

120. The stairs were made of concrete.

121. With regard to the modifications to the Tower (outside of our flat) I had concerns about
the gas piping in the emergency stairwell, there was a boiler outside of our flat on the right
hand side, which reduced the height of the ceiling and made the whole area cramped.

INJURIES SUFFERED

122. I didn’t suffer any physical injuries, but my daughter said she was having problems
breathing but not anything serious. I thought it was best to just to sleep and to act as normal

Richard FLETCHER
as possible so as not to stress her out any more than necessary. If her condition became worse then we would have gone to the hospital.

123. Thankfully we were only in the smoke for a few seconds.

124. We are keeping an eye on our daughter to see if she develops or shows any signs of changed behaviour or anxieties as a result of her own experience in the fire.

125. I had a very tough time in the aftermath of the fire. I was off work until September 2017 on a part time basis and then returned full time in December.

126. I had difficulties sleeping for a few months after the fire. Immediately after the fire I found myself getting up at 4 am to go out of the hotel to a coffee shop. I felt under tremendous stress.

127. I wonder how the fire and the events of the night will affect all of us and in particular our daughter. I have started to receive counselling which is helping but I know that it will take time. L[ ] is also about to start to receive counselling as is my wife.

CONCLUSION

128. I have endeavoured to set out in my own words what my family and I went through as a result of the fire at Grenfell Tower. However, it should be appreciated that without actually experiencing the terrifying incident as we did, I believe that anyone reading this will not have a real appreciation of the terror we encountered.

129. The complete disruption to ordinary family life caused by being burnt out your home is really significant. Nothing is the same. You are grateful that you and your family are alive but at the same time are terribly sad for all those that died. You lose all your belongings and it is important to remember that it is not only the loss of furnishings and clothing etc but also

Richard FLETCHER
the loss of very personal things such as treasured photographs and memorabilia. They cannot be replaced by money.

130. No child (or adult) should have to go through what we have been through. This is not something that will ever leave our daughter.

131. My desire is that such a tragedy never happens again and that no other families have to go through the trauma that the residents of Grenfell Tower had thrown at them through no fault of their own. People in the Inquiry must never forget when looking at the fire that above all this is a human tragedy that can never be forgotten or ever happen again.

Statement of Truth
I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing that the statement forms part of the evidence before the Inquiry, and may be published on the Inquiry’s website, save for redactions indicated in the text, and those applied by the Inquiry.

Signed: [Signature]

Richard Fletcher

Dated: 20.05.18