

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE Opening Statement for Phase 1 hearings

Introduction

1. The Metropolitan Police Service (“MPS”) acknowledges that the commencement of phase 1 of the Public Inquiry is a significant milestone in the response to the national tragedy that occurred on 14th June 2017 and the process of achieving a measure of justice for those who died and those who have suffered so grievously.
2. The MPS is committed to supporting the Inquiry in its difficult and important work, whilst also conducting its own thorough criminal investigation into all potential offences arising from the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower.
3. The MPS is a core participant in the public inquiry principally because of its role in conducting a parallel investigation, and the consequential need to ensure appropriate coordination and cooperation between two distinct investigations into the same events. The MPS will continue to provide material to the Inquiry during the course of the hearings in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding. It will not itself, however, seek to ask questions in the course of the Inquiry for the purpose of gathering evidence for the criminal investigation. Its primary role during the Inquiry will be to continue to honour the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding, to deal with any associated queries, and to observe proceedings in order to review the potential for impact on its investigation and any future criminal proceedings.
4. It is understood that the conduct of the police response to the fire is unlikely to be examined in detail by the Inquiry and no police first responders are anticipated to give evidence. However the MPS is compiling a corporate statement to explain the police response.

The progress of the criminal investigation

5. The criminal investigation is progressing in accordance with the strategic direction that was set from the outset and which was explained at the Inquiry's procedural hearings on 11th December 2017 and 21st March 2018.
6. The on-site forensic investigation of the tower is complete. Off-site testing and reconstruction work is ongoing. It is anticipated the Tower will be released as a crime scene in July or August 2018. The MPS is in the process of facilitating site visits by core participants, in accordance with the process set out by the Chairman in writing on 8th May 2018.

The arrangements between the Inquiry and the Metropolitan Police

7. As we have repeatedly set out, the consequence of the Inquiry and criminal investigation being conducted at the same time is that the Inquiry will need to make use of evidence that is obtained in the course of the police investigation, but to do so in a way that minimises the risks of prejudice to that investigation or subsequent criminal proceedings. The MPS and Inquiry must remain focussed on pre-empting any risk of prejudice. Within that context, finding a satisfactory balance between the two proceedings has, at times, been difficult, but the MPS has cooperated with the Inquiry in what we hope has been a constructive manner.
8. The magnitude of the investigation is unprecedented and extremely demanding. As well as focussing on the important task of investigating, officers within Operation Northleigh continue to dedicate a substantial proportion of their time to providing material to the Inquiry as requests arise, in addition to the established programme of voluntary proactive disclosure on a weekly basis.
9. Great effort has been made to be as responsive as possible to requests for material and to provide the Inquiry with everything that has been asked for as soon as possible. The strictures of a criminal investigation and the necessary procedures for gathering and recording evidence mean that it is simply not possible to complete investigative tasks and to provide disclosure immediately upon request. However, the MPS will continue to endeavour to act promptly and is mindful of the pressing need to assist the efficient running of the upcoming hearings.

10. The MPS has not refused to provide any material to the Inquiry. It has engaged with the Inquiry over the question of disclosure of material to Core Participants and has not, in the event, formally objected to disclosure of any material which the Inquiry has considered it appropriate to provide to Core Participants.
11. The MPS remains committed to facilitating the ongoing disclosure process.

17th May 2018

Jeremy Johnson QC

Amy Clarke