



GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY RT

Day 284

May 25, 2022

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Wednesday, 25 May 2022

1
2 (10.00 am)
3 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to
4 today's hearing. Today we're going to hear from
5 a witness who, at the time of the fire, was a senior
6 officer in the Department for Communities and Local
7 Government.
8 Yes, Ms Malhotra.
9 MS MALHOTRA: Good morning, Mr Chairman. Good morning,
10 members of the panel.
11 Could I please call Dr Jo Farrar.
12 DR JO FARRAR (sworn)
13 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much. Now, please
14 sit down. Make yourself comfortable.
15 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
16 (Pause)
17 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Right, yes, Ms Malhotra.
18 Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY
19 MS MALHOTRA: Good morning, Dr Farrar.
20 Can I start by thanking you very much for attending
21 to give evidence to the Inquiry today.
22 Just a few words by way of introduction, if I may.
23 Could I ask you, please, to keep your voice up so
24 that we can hear you clearly. It also helps not to nod
25 or shake, but to say "Yes" or "No", because nods and

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1 shakes don't get picked up on the transcript.
2 If any of my questions are unclear, please say so
3 and I will happily rephrase the question.
4 Lastly, if you feel you need a break at any time,
5 please let me know.
6 Is that okay?
7 A. That's fine, thanks.
8 Q. Now, you have made two statements to the Inquiry and
9 they will appear on the screen in front of you.
10 Taking you to your first statement, please, that's
11 {CLG00030414}. We can see there on the right-hand side
12 it's dated 14 March 2019.
13 There is a signature on page 23; is that yours?
14 A. Yes, it is.
15 Q. I'd like to take you to your second statement now.
16 That's {CLG00030781}. We can see it's dated
17 2 November 2020.
18 There's a signature on page 7; is that your
19 signature?
20 A. Yes, it is.
21 Q. Have you had an opportunity to read each of your
22 statements recently?
23 A. Yes, I have.
24 Q. Can you confirm that they are true to the best of your
25 knowledge?

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1 A. Yes, they are.
2 Q. The focus of my questions today, Dr Farrar, will be in
3 the following three parts: firstly, your background and
4 role at the time of the fire; secondly, your oversight
5 of the resilience and emergencies division, RED, which
6 we heard about yesterday from your former colleague
7 Gill McManus; and, thirdly and finally, your actions and
8 the actions of DCLG in response in the days after the
9 fire.
10 So, first, turning, then, to your role at the time
11 of the fire.
12 You were director general for local government and
13 public services at the Department for Communities and
14 Local Government, as it was known then; is that right?
15 A. That's right.
16 Q. The Inquiry heard evidence yesterday that the
17 department, DCLG, changed its name in 2018 to become
18 known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
19 Government, MHCLG, and it then subsequently changed its
20 name to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
21 Communities, DLUHC. I'm going to refer to it as DCLG
22 during the course of my questions. Okay?
23 A. Thank you.
24 Q. At the time of the fire, you were part of DCLG's
25 leadership team; is that right?

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1 A. That's right.
2 Q. You reported to Melanie Dawes, who was then the
3 Permanent Secretary of DCLG; is that right?
4 A. That's right.
5 Q. You are now the Second Permanent Secretary at the
6 Ministry of Justice and chief executive of HM Prisons
7 and Probation Service; is that right?
8 A. That's right.
9 Q. I'd like to ask you about your roles that you were
10 involved in before your time with DCLG, if I may.
11 Is it correct that, before your role at DCLG, you
12 were chief executive of Bath and North East Somerset
13 Council between March 2012 and August 2016?
14 A. I was.
15 Q. Before that, you were chief executive of the Bridgend
16 County Borough Council between October 2006 and
17 March 2012; is that right?
18 A. Yes, I believe I started in Bridgend in January, not the
19 previous October, but that's when I was appointed.
20 Q. You had a decade's worth of experience of being a chief
21 executive of a local council; is that right?
22 A. That's right.
23 Q. In those chief executive roles, did you have a good
24 working knowledge of resilience procedures for those
25 areas in which you were a chief executive?

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1 A. I did.
 2 Q. Now, in your first witness statement — I'd like to take
 3 you to it, please — page 2, paragraph 9
 4 {CLG00030414/2}, you say here:
 5 "As a result of my responsibility for RED, I was
 6 required to have a broad understanding of the terms of
 7 the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Civil
 8 Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning)
 9 Regulations 2005 and the associated guidance, although
 10 I would be advised by specialists in the RED team."
 11 Is that right?
 12 A. That's right.
 13 Q. As part of your role as director general for local
 14 government and public services at the time, did one of
 15 those responsibilities include oversight of DCLG's
 16 resilience and emergencies division, known as RED?
 17 A. It did, but I should explain the structure: so I was the
 18 director general, underneath me was Jillian Kay, who was
 19 the director, and then Katherine Richardson, who was the
 20 senior civil servant responsible for RED.
 21 Q. Turning, then, to the function of RED.
 22 The Inquiry has already heard evidence from
 23 Ms McManus yesterday, who was a resilience adviser, as
 24 to the function of RED. But, in short, would you agree
 25 that one of RED's functions was as a conduit between

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1 central government and local responders when it came to
 2 responding to emergencies?
 3 A. Yes, a conduit, a liaison point.
 4 Q. I'd like to move on to events on 14 June, if I may,
 5 taking matters chronologically as best I can.
 6 You were first alerted to the fire by an email from
 7 Gill McManus, who was duty head of resilience that
 8 night, at 5.55 on 14 June; is that right?
 9 A. That's right.
 10 Q. If we could go to {CLG00030446}, I believe we should be
 11 able to see that notification that you received.
 12 Is this it?
 13 A. Yes, I believe so.
 14 Q. We can see it's an email at 5.55 from Ms McManus.
 15 I would like to take you further down the page,
 16 please, to the fifth paragraph down, where it says this:
 17 "There are suggestions in the media that the cause
 18 of the fire could be neglect of health and safety
 19 legislation. Grenfell Action Group have suggested that
 20 a major fire was averted in 2013 when faulty wiring
 21 caused power surges. The block is owned by the local
 22 authority."
 23 Did you consider or anticipate at that early stage
 24 that there would be any problems with RBKC leading on
 25 the recovery, given that it was owner of the tower, and

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1 media reports that were circulating at the time
 2 suggesting the fire could have been caused by neglect?
 3 A. So, no, I didn't at that time anticipate any issues with
 4 the local authority, and I also knew that the local
 5 authority was part of the London Resilience operation,
 6 which had responded to many local emergencies.
 7 Q. We'll come on to talk about the resilience arrangements
 8 in due course.
 9 Was it something that you then went on to consider,
 10 the conflict between the council owning the building and
 11 the media reports that were circulating at the time? Is
 12 it something that you then went on to consider after?
 13 A. So not personally, no, I was very much focused on the
 14 local authority and the recovery period.
 15 Q. We can see here, under the "Issues for DCLG", that
 16 reference is made to fire policy and DCLG Building
 17 Regulations. There isn't any reference here to any
 18 resourcing considerations for the department.
 19 Would you have expected at this early stage there to
 20 be some consideration of the impact that the incident
 21 would have on resourcing for RED?
 22 A. So not at this early stage. In fact, the way that —
 23 well, the responsibilities of RED, as I say, were really
 24 a liaison point between the local response and central
 25 government, and they were resourced to be that liaison

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1 point.
 2 Q. Was it the role of RED to be responsible for supporting
 3 the local authority response?
 4 A. No.
 5 Q. You emailed Ms McManus, and we can go to that now at
 6 {CLG00002859}. It's the second email on the page at
 7 7.05, and you say this:
 8 "Thanks Gill. I presume we will also be involved in
 9 any recovery issues. We are due to brief the
 10 [Secretary of State] this morning on another issue, but
 11 we can make sure he is updated as well.
 12 "Thanks to RED for responding so quickly."
 13 She then responds to you, we can go up to an email
 14 at 7.07, saying:
 15 "Morning Jo
 16 "Yes this will almost certainly be a local authority
 17 led recovery.
 18 "Will keep you updated."
 19 What other type of recovery could there have been,
 20 if not a local authority—led one?
 21 A. So for an incident like this, I would have assumed it
 22 would be a local authority—led recovery, given the
 23 nature of the incident. So in emergency situations, the
 24 incident is split into two: a response phase, which in
 25 this case was led by the SCG locally reporting in to the

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1 Home Office; and then there'll be a recovery phase,
 2 which looks at the longer-term recovery, and given the
 3 nature of this incident and the impact on individuals in
 4 the community, I assumed it would be a local
 5 authority-led recovery.
 6 So as director general for local government and
 7 public services, I would have been concerned to make
 8 sure that if the local authority was taking over the
 9 recovery phase from, in this instance, the police, that
 10 they were equipped to do that, and that's why I was
 11 asking that question.
 12 Q. You can see here that you say, "I presume we will ... be
 13 involved in any recovery issues". That's the second
 14 email on the page at 7.05. Can you explain, what did
 15 you mean by that?
 16 A. Yes, so actually a choice has to be made in terms of
 17 which government department leads recovery. I assumed
 18 it would be a role for us. If it's a local
 19 authority-led recovery, then it would have tended to be
 20 the department who were then the lead government
 21 department. At the time of the fire, the response
 22 phase, we weren't the lead government department. So
 23 I needed to ascertain — and this was the nature of the
 24 question — whether the recovery phase would move from
 25 the Home Office to the department, because that would

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1 involve us then making sure we had the adequate
 2 structures in place to oversee that.
 3 Q. I'd like to take you to your first witness statement,
 4 please, paragraph 24, page 6 {CLG00030414/6}. We can
 5 see there at paragraph 24 you say:
 6 "At the same time, it was inevitable that RBKC would
 7 have a central role in the relief effort, given the
 8 location of Grenfell Tower and its residents. In the
 9 circumstances, my expectation was that either RBKC or
 10 the London Resilience Partnership would lead the
 11 recovery effort."
 12 I just want to ask you about that. Is this a view
 13 that you formed at the time, or is this a reflection
 14 that you've had since, whilst drafting your statement?
 15 A. No, it's a — I think you can see from the email with
 16 Gill that this was a consideration at the time, and
 17 an assumption at the time.
 18 Q. When you refer to the local resilience partnership
 19 potentially leading the recovery effort, can you assist
 20 us with what your understanding would be as to how that
 21 would be done?
 22 A. Yes. So in London there was — and I think you heard
 23 from other witnesses that there was a London Resilience
 24 Partnership, which supported local authorities in terms
 25 of leading major incidents, and actually tended to play

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1 a leading role, in my experience, in incidents in
 2 London. So I would have expected that either RBKC or
 3 the London Resilience Partnership would have had a heavy
 4 involvement, given the nature of the — or given the
 5 circumstances.
 6 Q. What process or mechanism do you understand they would
 7 be using to lead the recovery effort?
 8 A. So I would have expected a Local Authority Gold response
 9 to be set up, and then you — that used to lead the
 10 recovery effort, and bringing in other partners as
 11 necessary.
 12 Q. Is that the London Local Authority Gold arrangements
 13 that the Inquiry has heard about, the LLAG?
 14 A. Yes, so that is one option. I mean, obviously RBKC
 15 could have chosen to set up their own Gold arrangements.
 16 I hadn't envisaged they will do, given the strength —
 17 they would do, given the strength of the support
 18 available in London.
 19 Q. So you mentioned two options there: one would be an RBKC
 20 Gold, the second would be an LLAG Gold.
 21 A. Yes. So, for example, as a local authority chief
 22 executive, when I led on incidents, then we — I would
 23 set up a Local Authority Gold, not having access to the
 24 same support, being in a different area of the country,
 25 but there would be a Gold arrangement that would be set

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1 up that would pull in other partners as necessary to
 2 make sure that the recovery effort continues to be led
 3 well.
 4 Q. When you say "pull in other partners", can you just
 5 expand upon: what would your understanding be of how
 6 an LLAG Gold would operate? Would they take over
 7 a response, for example, or would it be more nuanced
 8 than that?
 9 A. So they would take over the recovery phase. The
 10 response phase would come to an end, the police or
 11 whoever was the Response Gold would hand over to the
 12 Local Authority Gold, and then you would be responsible
 13 for leading the recovery effort in the area. Sometimes
 14 that involves other partners. So, for example, I was
 15 involved in some very actually tragic deaths in
 16 Bridgend, where I led the Gold but brought in health and
 17 the police, because we were very much working in
 18 partnership to support the community in Bridgend at that
 19 time.
 20 Q. So was it your understanding that one local authority
 21 would take over from another local authority?
 22 A. No, my understanding isn't that one local authority
 23 would take over from another authority. Actually, the
 24 local authority would take over from a different
 25 authority. So if the response phase was led by the

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1 police, then Local Authority Gold would — may take that
 2 over, if that was the decision, in the recovery phase.
 3 I think in London there are different — there were
 4 different arrangements. So it could be that London
 5 Resilience played a bigger role in terms of the Local
 6 Authority Gold, as in fact we eventually saw in
 7 Kensington and Chelsea.
 8 Q. I'd like to move on, if I may, in time to around
 9 about — not too much further on, though — 7.15 on
 10 14 June.
 11 You had a conversation with Melanie Dawes, the
 12 Permanent Secretary. In your first witness statement,
 13 page 5 {CLG00030414/5}, paragraph 20, you say that you
 14 spoke to Ms Dawes at around 7.45. In her statement
 15 {CLG00030653/8}, she says that she believes you spoken
 16 to one another at 7.15. It may be that there's little
 17 in it, but are you able to assist us with whether there
 18 was a conversation at 7.15 and another at 7.45, or was
 19 there just one conversation at some point at 7 o'clock?
 20 A. No, there was one conversation between 7 o'clock and
 21 8 o'clock. It's probably my memory, but it was — there
 22 was one conversation.
 23 Q. I'd like to take you to Ms Dawes' statement, please,
 24 that's {CLG00030653/8}, we can see here at paragraph 20,
 25 and it's the third line down:

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1 "I recall messaging my Private Secretary at around
 2 07:15 and ringing Jo Farrar to discuss how the
 3 Department would need to be involved. It was clear that
 4 the immediate response was for the emergency services
 5 and other local responders. The recovery would be led
 6 locally, but I was clear that the Department would
 7 almost certainly coordinate the wider Central Government
 8 support that would be needed to support recovery from
 9 an incident on this scale."
 10 Did you both discuss how the department would be
 11 involved?
 12 A. Yes. Yes, we did, and we certainly discussed that the
 13 department would have a role in the recovery part of the
 14 management of the incident.
 15 Q. When you mention a role in the recovery, could you just
 16 help us with telling us what that would entail?
 17 A. Yes. So as I said earlier, I think as the emergency
 18 moved from response to recovery, our understanding was
 19 that this was likely to be a local authority—led
 20 recovery. As the Department for Communities and Local
 21 Government, we felt that we would probably be the lead
 22 government department, but if not, we would still have
 23 a big role, being responsible for local government at
 24 that time.
 25 Q. What does it mean to be the lead government department

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1 in recovery, though, what would that actually mean that
 2 you would be doing?
 3 A. So that means that you would be the — so you would pull
 4 together other government departments, would be the lead
 5 department on any ministerial group, would be the first
 6 point of contact for government.
 7 Q. Would it mean that you would be operational in any way
 8 on the ground?
 9 A. No, so not — no, not necessarily, that was not normally
 10 our role, unless there was a decision that central
 11 government should be involved operationally. But our —
 12 essentially our role was to make sure that the recovery
 13 effort was operating effectively.
 14 Q. Let's go to your witness statement at page 5
 15 {CLG00030414/5}, paragraph 20, please. It's the last
 16 sentence there. We can see:
 17 "Melanie Dawes indicated that she knew
 18 Nicholas Holgate during her time at HM Treasury and
 19 would contact him to offer Government's support."
 20 Is that right?
 21 A. Yes, that's right. We — I remember discussing with
 22 Melanie that we both felt it would be good to make sure
 23 that the chief executive of RBKC knew that he could
 24 reach out to government for support if he felt that was
 25 necessary. As she had an existing relationship, she

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1 said that she would contact him.
 2 Q. Moving on in time, at 9 o'clock on 14 June you received
 3 a briefing from Katherine Richardson, as you've already
 4 mentioned, the deputy director of RED, which included
 5 the leadership and co—ordination of the local response.
 6 That's what you say in your statement.
 7 Can you assist us with what specifically you did to
 8 discuss the leadership and co—ordination of the
 9 response?
 10 A. Yes. From my memory, we discussed the SCG and the fact
 11 that RED was attending SCG meetings, and I believe she
 12 gave me a report back on issues that had come from SCG
 13 meetings.
 14 Q. Was it clear to you who was leading the response in
 15 relation to humanitarian assistance, for example?
 16 A. No, not at that point.
 17 Q. Was there any discussion at that stage about whether the
 18 local authority would be able to deal with the
 19 humanitarian response or if they needed any greater
 20 support?
 21 A. I'm not sure. There was discussion about whether the
 22 local authority needed support, but I'm not sure if it
 23 was at that point.
 24 Q. Well, we've mentioned Mr Holgate and the pre—existing
 25 relationship that you mentioned Ms Dawes had with him

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1 whilst working at HM Treasury.
 2 I would like to take you to, please, {CLG00002873}.
 3 This is an email at 9.07, sent by the office of Ms Dawes
 4 to Mr Holgate, and we can see that your office was
 5 copied in to that, and it says this:
 6 "Dear Nick,
 7 "I just wanted to express how shocked and sad I was
 8 to hear about the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower this
 9 morning.
 10 "We are ready to help however we can from Central
 11 Government — Jo Farrar from DCLG is already leading on
 12 this. Obviously today you will be dealing with the
 13 immediate response but do let us know — as and when it
 14 is helpful — if there is anything [else] we can do."
 15 Were you leading on central government support to
 16 RBKC at this time that this email was sent?
 17 A. So I was — I think what Melanie was referring to is
 18 that, at the time, I was involved in pulling together
 19 any information that we had and looking at the central
 20 government response. But I should say that there was
 21 a different command structure put in place in central
 22 government. It might be worth explaining that. I know
 23 you will have had it in other witness statements, but at
 24 the time the response was being — was that lead
 25 government department was the Home Office. Very shortly

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1 into the incident, a ministerial — an ad hoc
 2 ministerial group was set up. That — the lead
 3 department on that group was the Home Office.
 4 In the Department for Communities and Local
 5 Government, Melanie attended those ministerial meetings,
 6 and Helen MacNamara, who I believe you also had
 7 a statement from, was the lead for DCLG in terms of —
 8 because a number of the issues related to housing and
 9 rehousing and the TMO, and all of that was in Helen's
 10 area of responsibility.
 11 So my area of responsibility essentially was about
 12 the SCG and RED and whether there were any requests for
 13 help from central government through that route. So —
 14 but I would be the lead contact for chief executives,
 15 given my role, so I believe that's what Melanie was
 16 referring to. So if Nicholas Holgate had wanted to
 17 reach out to somebody, she was essentially telling him
 18 he should contact me.
 19 Q. So it wasn't necessarily that there was anything
 20 specific that you had done at that point or that you
 21 were preparing to do to make an offer of support to
 22 RBKC, for example?
 23 A. No, but I would be the lead contact for him, and I think
 24 that's what Melanie is referring to.
 25 Q. At 9.30, together with Katherine Richardson and

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1 Jillian Kay, you met with the Secretary of State; is
 2 that right?
 3 A. Yes, I believe there were others at that meeting as
 4 well.
 5 Q. Was this the first meeting with the Secretary of State
 6 regarding the fire?
 7 A. It was the first meeting I attended. I believed he'd
 8 been updated separately, but possibly by his private
 9 office.
 10 Q. I'd like to take you to paragraph 28 of your first
 11 statement. That's page 6 {CLG00030414/6}, please. We
 12 can see there in the second sentence:
 13 "We discussed, amongst other issues, the local
 14 response and the support that central government could
 15 offer."
 16 Just pausing there, can you assist us with what was
 17 specifically discussed regarding the local response and
 18 the support that central government could offer?
 19 A. So, from my memory, it was mostly about housing and the
 20 support that central government might offer. There was
 21 also a question about funding, and whether the local
 22 authority could access funding. We have a scheme to
 23 allow local authorities to access funding in
 24 emergencies —
 25 Q. Is that the Bellwin funding?

19

1 A. — and that's the Bellwin funding. But I do believe
 2 there will have been a minute of that meeting.
 3 Q. Could I just invite you to look at Jillian Kay's first
 4 witness statement. That's {CLG00030430/4}, at
 5 paragraph 15. She says:
 6 "As well as noting what was understood about the
 7 fire and those affected by it, I noted that there had
 8 been no request for government assistance at that point
 9 from the SCG or directly from the Local Authority.
 10 I noted that the London Borough of Hammersmith and
 11 Fulham had offered mutual aid to the Royal Borough of
 12 Kensington and Chelsea ('RBKC'). From the discussion,
 13 I noted that my colleagues in Housing within the
 14 Department my need to step in later to help with
 15 rehousing ..."
 16 She refers us to her note of that meeting, which
 17 I would like to take you to. It's {CLG00030410}. We
 18 can see there, 14 June, it says, "9am SoS
 19 [Secretary of State] briefing". There is then a line,
 20 and underneath it, it says:
 21 "— SCG — DCLG attended.
 22 "— No specific requests for government [I think that
 23 says].
 24 "— Also speaking H&F [Hammersmith and Fulham] re
 25 mutual aid."

20

1 Does that accord with your recollection of what was
 2 said at the meeting?
 3 A. Yes. I mean, that's right, there were no specific
 4 requests from government from the SCG. I mean, I don't
 5 know if it would help if I just briefly expand on how
 6 the SCGs operate.
 7 So the SCGs bring together all of the local
 8 responders. They're chaired, structured in a very
 9 specific and organised way. There's an opportunity for
 10 everybody to feed in requests of help. RED attend that
 11 meeting, and any person in that meeting can request help
 12 from government, and that will be fed back to either
 13 the — well, to the lead government department. And
 14 certainly when I have been involved as a chief executive
 15 in incidents, the presence of RED is very visible and
 16 the question is asked, "Is there any" — in my
 17 experience, the question's always been asked, "Is there
 18 any help needed from central government or anything that
 19 you are struggling with?"
 20 So, no, they —
 21 Q. That's your expectation of what would ordinarily be
 22 asked —
 23 A. That is my —
 24 Q. — but you don't know whether that was asked in this
 25 instance; is that —

21

1 A. Well, we were — it was reported back from RED that
 2 there was no specific requests from government.
 3 I assume that was accurate, and I'm sure it would be
 4 accurate.
 5 Q. Were you aware of any other offers of assistance that
 6 RBKC had received at that time?
 7 A. Not specifically, but I would have expected that London
 8 Resilience would have been in contact with the council,
 9 and London Resilience were able to bring in mutual aid
 10 from different authorities. In fact, it was unusual
 11 that Hammersmith and Fulham were offering mutual aid and
 12 not — it would usually come, I believe, through the
 13 London Resilience Forum. But in this case, Hammersmith
 14 and Fulham are very close to Kensington and Chelsea, so
 15 would have probably made an offer direct.
 16 Q. You mentioned earlier a read-out. I'm going to take you
 17 to, I believe, a read-out of the briefing. It's
 18 {CLG00002915}. If we could — well, let me identify
 19 that this is an email at ... If I could take you to
 20 {CLG00002915}.
 21 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: That's what I've got on the screen.
 22 Have you?
 23 MS MALHOTRA: Page 2 {CLG00002915/2}.
 24 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Ah.
 25 MS MALHOTRA: We can see here at the very bottom of page 1

22

1 {CLG00002915/1} on 14 June at 11.54 there's a read-out,
 2 and if we go further down on to page 2 {CLG00002915/2},
 3 we can see "Actions for Katherine R [Richardson]/RED":
 4 "■ Please could you draft a background briefing on
 5 Bellwin funding and how this has been used in the past.
 6 "■ Grateful if you could also pass on the read out
 7 of the Strategic Co-ordination Group meeting that took
 8 place this morning."
 9 We can see there that there is an action for
 10 Katherine Richardson. We can see that there are
 11 a number of other actions recorded.
 12 Would it be fair to say that there was a wide ambit
 13 of issues that the department was dealing with?
 14 A. Yeah, that's absolutely fair. So Katherine Richardson
 15 and RED really act as the liaison point with the SCG,
 16 but this was — this incident obviously involved a fire
 17 and housing, and there were a number of issues related
 18 to the fire that would have been — that were dealt with
 19 in a different part of the department, and I think they
 20 will have been covered in Helen MacNamara and
 21 Sally Randall's statements.
 22 Q. Now, we've mentioned the Bellwin scheme; is it right
 23 that that's for emergency financial assistance for local
 24 authorities to meet uninsurable costs that they've
 25 incurred when responding to an emergency?

23

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. Is that right?
 3 A. Yeah.
 4 Q. Effectively, the mechanics of money.
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. We can see here that there aren't any actions arising
 7 out of what central government could be doing, what your
 8 department — what the department could be doing to
 9 support the local authority; would you agree with that?
 10 A. Yes, there are no actions, and there was certainly no
 11 request from the local authority for support.
 12 Q. What about consideration for replacement passports,
 13 for example? What about the number of people that would
 14 be displaced as a result of the fire? Was any
 15 consideration given to that?
 16 A. So I remember conversations about people being displaced
 17 as the fire — that was being dealt with by — in
 18 another director general area, but there were certainly
 19 conversations about that.
 20 Q. Can you assist us with what the reason was for the
 21 minister asking for the SCG minutes?
 22 A. So I presume — well, Katherine Richardson at the
 23 meeting gave a read-out of what happened at the
 24 strategic co-ordination group. I believe the minister
 25 thought it would be happy to — helpful to have the note

24

1 for our records. I think that was good practice.
 2 Q. There was nothing usual about that, was there?
 3 A. No, absolutely not, and actually, as I say, good
 4 practice to make sure that we have a note of the
 5 relevant meetings.
 6 Q. I'd like to show you, please, go to the
 7 Secretary of State's witness statement. It's his first
 8 witness statement, {CLG10009728/2}. At paragraph 7 he
 9 says this:
 10 "We were aware from the start that it would require
 11 all the energy we could give, both in terms of direct
 12 help and in terms of coordinating the response across
 13 Government. In my view, it is the job of central
 14 government following a disaster like this to do more
 15 than we would normally do. There was a significant
 16 emotional element — people had lost their loved ones,
 17 their homes and all their belongings. At a time like
 18 that they should be able to look to government. They
 19 should be able to have very high expectations of what
 20 government will deliver."
 21 He goes on to say:
 22 "I also felt that any council involved in such
 23 a catastrophic event would soon be overwhelmed and would
 24 need support — including support that only government is
 25 in a position to give. We wanted to ensure that support

25

1 was given sooner rather than later. Which was why we
 2 offered help as soon as we did — from the morning of
 3 14 June."
 4 Do you consider that the department's response at
 5 this time — so 9.30, at the time that this briefing was
 6 going on — was aligned with this statement by the
 7 Secretary of State in his statement?
 8 A. Yes, I believe it was aligned, absolutely. I mean,
 9 we — in an incident like this, you would expect the
 10 local responders to be asking for help, and we'd
 11 identified, for example, the issue of funding in other
 12 parts of the department, which I'm not really qualified
 13 to speak to, but I'm sure there will have been other
 14 issues that the department felt that they could and
 15 would want to help with. But in my area, certainly the
 16 funding, which came under my remit, we were looking at
 17 proactively to make sure that we were ready to give
 18 emergency funding support if and when needed.
 19 Q. You say you were looking at that; can you assist us with
 20 when that funding support, the Bellwin scheme, was
 21 actually put into effect?
 22 A. Actually, I can't, I would have to look at the notes,
 23 but I remember from that meeting that work was going on
 24 in the local government finance team to make sure that
 25 that support was available.

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1 Q. If I was to suggest that it was a few days later, would
 2 you disagree with that?
 3 A. Probably not.
 4 Q. I'd like to move to contact that you had with Mr Holgate
 5 on the morning of 14 June.
 6 We can see here {CLG00030460}. We should be able to
 7 see here an email that your office sent at 9.27 on
 8 14 June on your behalf, asking for a mobile number for
 9 the chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea.
 10 Were you trying to speak with Mr Holgate?
 11 A. I wanted to send him a message. So I was aware that
 12 Melanie Dawes had contacted him separately, and we'd
 13 agreed that she would. I knew that she had said that
 14 I was his contact in government, so I wanted to make
 15 sure that he had my mobile number and was able to
 16 contact me at any point.
 17 Q. You say in your statement {CLG00030414/6} — we don't
 18 need to go to it now — that you sent him a text message
 19 to arrange a time to speak. You recall saying that the
 20 department was in contact with RBKC and offering
 21 support. Is that right?
 22 A. Yes, that's right.
 23 Q. Did you say, "We think you need support that only
 24 central government is in a position to offer you"?
 25 A. So not at that point. I was at that point trying to get

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1 hold of him, actually, and to give him my contact
 2 details. I believe I also asked my office to contact
 3 his office to set up a time for us to speak.
 4 Q. It's right to say that you didn't receive a reply to
 5 this message, did you?
 6 A. I don't remember receiving a reply.
 7 Q. Did you attempt to contact Mr Holgate again on 14 June?
 8 A. I believe my office contacted his office to arrange
 9 a time for us to speak.
 10 Q. Did you in fact speak with him on the 14th?
 11 A. I believe it was the 15th I spoke to him.
 12 Q. You mentioned earlier about enquiries into RBKC. I'd
 13 just like to look at those now.
 14 At 1.42 on 14 June, your secretary contacted
 15 Alex Powell, who was responsible for collating
 16 information on local authorities, to request background
 17 information on RBKC. We can see this at
 18 {CLG00030414/6} — this is your statement — at
 19 paragraph 30, that you refer to it.
 20 Can you assist us with why you made this request?
 21 A. Yes, absolutely. So Alex Powell was the deputy director
 22 for local government stewardship, and that was the part
 23 of the department that brought together information on
 24 local authorities. It was the part of the department
 25 that really looked at the performance of local

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1 authorities . So I thought it would be really sensible
 2 to check whether we had any concerns about the Royal
 3 Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, you know, to make
 4 sure that they were able to deal with something like
 5 this.
 6 At the time I felt that they would be drawing on the
 7 support of London Resilience, but I felt it was also
 8 really important just to check out if there was any
 9 background information on the local authority itself .
 10 Q. Was that standard procedure?
 11 A. Yes, absolutely.
 12 MS MALHOTRA: Did anything —
 13 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Sorry to interrupt.
 14 What sort of background information were you looking
 15 for?
 16 A. So we would collect information on local authorities ,
 17 working closely with the LGA, from different inspection
 18 reports or other information that we'd gathered together
 19 really to make sure that the local authority system was
 20 functioning, and there would have been some local
 21 authorities that we were more concerned with. In fact,
 22 you'll have seen examples where local government has
 23 intervened in different local authorities . But Royal
 24 Borough of Kensington and Chelsea weren't one of those
 25 authorities that were flagged up through all of the

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1 information that we had as being an authority of concern
 2 to us, in terms of their — this is in terms of their
 3 general performance across their services .
 4 MS MALHOTRA: Let's see if we can go to those documents. It
 5 may help as to what the request was.
 6 {CLG00002954}, please. At 1.43, we can see at the
 7 bottom of the page there:
 8 "Jo would like a little more information on our
 9 relationship with Kensington and Chelsea. Are they on
 10 your radar for any reason, and if so, why? Or is there
 11 any other information it would be useful for her to
 12 note?"
 13 That's the general request that was sent.
 14 If we go up, we can see at 2.05 in the afternoon
 15 that Mr Powell receives confirmation:
 16 "... K&C aren't on our radar at all and therefore we
 17 don't hold anything on them."
 18 It then goes on to say that:
 19 "The Ministerial Support Unit have an app/database
 20 on councils which can provide general info (facts and
 21 figures on funding, housing, TF ..."
 22 What does that stand for?
 23 A. I'm not sure, actually.
 24 Q. "... if that's of use. The most recent development of
 25 note that I'm aware of is the break—down of the

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1 tri—borough agreement but I suspect Jo is already
 2 sighted on that."
 3 Were you sighted on the breakdown of the tri—borough
 4 agreement?
 5 A. Yes, I was. Actually, I think TF probably relates to
 6 troubled families , but I'm not 100% sure. I'm sure
 7 I knew at the time.
 8 Q. I'd like to take you next to {CLG00002952}, please. We
 9 can see here an email that was in fact sent to
 10 Melanie Dawes' office, and we can see there:
 11 "This is some really basic background about
 12 Kensington and Chelsea and the Department's relationship
 13 with them."
 14 It then goes on to say that there is a fact sheet
 15 that's attached and information on Kensington and
 16 Chelsea.
 17 It goes on to talk about the leader:
 18 " ■ His relationship with the Department is good. He
 19 is well respected and open to discussing various ideas.
 20 " ■ The general view of officials is that he is
 21 a safe pair of hands who runs a tight and steady ship.
 22 " ■ Has been in post since 2013.
 23 " ■ Was part of the tri—borough system with
 24 Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster this will
 25 officially end in 2018."

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1 Was that your understanding as well?
 2 A. Well, I — actually, Kensington and Chelsea was not
 3 a local authority that I knew well, hence why I was
 4 asking Alex for the information at the time. I wanted
 5 to understand more about them. I wanted to speak to
 6 Nicholas Holgate and wanted to make sure that I was
 7 prepared for that meeting, but also I think, in the
 8 absence of hearing from Nicholas Holgate, I wanted to
 9 reassure myself that this was not a council that we were
 10 concerned about.
 11 As I say, at the time, I felt they would be drawing
 12 on the support of London Resilience as well. Certainly
 13 had knowledge and confidence of London Resilience,
 14 having worked in a London local authority previously.
 15 Q. We can see here that it says the Secretary of State has
 16 spoken to the leader today, and then it goes on to say
 17 that the Minister for London is also going to speak
 18 later that afternoon.
 19 Then so far as Mr Holgate is concerned, it says:
 20 " ■ Melanie has emailed and Jo has text today.
 21 " ■ He confirmed that [he has] received lots of blue
 22 light support.
 23 " ■ Previously worked in HMT — the Department has
 24 very good relationship with him."
 25 Is this the reference that we mentioned earlier,

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1 where you say Ms Dawes previously knew him from work
 2 elsewhere in government?
 3 A. Yes, I believe Melanie knew him. I'm not sure how well,
 4 actually, but I believe she knew him from HMT, Treasury.
 5 Q. We can see here at the top of the email it says "some
 6 really basic background"; you would agree that that's
 7 indeed what it is, very basic?
 8 A. Yes, it's very basic, and we were concerned to know
 9 more, actually, hence my trying to speak to
 10 Nicholas Holgate and then having the conversation on the
 11 15th.
 12 I mean, I should say that, actually, we gather basic
 13 information on local authorities. Just because the
 14 relationship with the department hasn't caused any
 15 concern in the past, we have seen from other local
 16 authorities that that doesn't necessarily mean that
 17 they're able to cope with every eventuality, so hence
 18 wanting to speak to Nicholas Holgate and understand that
 19 more.
 20 Q. Yes. We'll come to that.
 21 But let's just have a look at the fact sheet,
 22 please, {CLG00036412}, for completeness. It seems to be
 23 a fact sheet about finance. Is that a fair summary?
 24 A. Actually, no, I don't think it is all about finance.
 25 No, there seems to be a range of information on there.

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1 Q. Would you accept that it's relatively superficial
 2 information that's been provided?
 3 A. Yes, I mean, that would — yes, that would just be
 4 information that we had that was provided, yeah.
 5 Q. It doesn't provide an assessment of their ability to
 6 cope in an emergency. I think you've already said that.
 7 A. No, and in fact I — at the time, the department wasn't
 8 resourced nor do I believe it was our role to really
 9 assess the emergency plans of local authorities.
 10 Q. Did you, in your role with oversight of RED, or do you
 11 know if RED would have received information about what
 12 training or exercising of pan-London resilience plans
 13 RBKC had been involved in?
 14 A. I don't think they would have had a detailed
 15 understanding of that. I think they will have had some
 16 reassurance, mostly through London Resilience, that
 17 structures were in place, but they certainly wouldn't
 18 have had detailed looks at individual local authority
 19 plans. I mean, that's not something that was assessed
 20 to be their role at the time or they were resourced to
 21 do.
 22 Q. Do you think information of that nature would have been
 23 helpful?
 24 A. In this incident, it may have been helpful. I would
 25 question whether that would have been a RED role,

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1 because it would have covered the whole of government,
 2 or whether that would have been something that the
 3 Cabinet Office would have been interested in. But the
 4 RED team worked closely with the Cabinet Office.
 5 Q. You also contacted the Local Government Association to
 6 see if there was anything you needed to know about RBKC
 7 which was relevant to its ability to deal with the
 8 disaster. Did they provide you with any relevant
 9 information?
 10 A. I'm struggling to remember, I'm really sorry. I mean,
 11 I think we had a general conversation about Kensington
 12 and Chelsea as an authority. I believe I asked them
 13 about — also about London Resilience, and I believe
 14 I asked them about the chief executive at the time,
 15 Nicholas Holgate.
 16 Q. Well, I'd like to move next to a meeting that you
 17 attended with Melanie Dawes at 3.30 on 14 June.
 18 You refer to it in your statement — and I'll take
 19 you to it — at page 7 {CLG00030414/7}, paragraph 33.
 20 It says:
 21 "At 3.30 pm on Wednesday, I attended a meeting with
 22 Melanie Dawes. At around this time, I recall she
 23 informed me that she had contacted Nicholas Holgate and
 24 that he had informed her that RBKC had the situation
 25 under control and did not need any central government

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1 support."
 2 Was there a minute of your meeting with
 3 Melanie Dawes?
 4 A. I'm not sure, actually. If there was a minute, I'm sure
 5 we would have provided it for the record, but I do
 6 remember that conversation. I also remember that we
 7 discussed whether I should speak to him as well, because
 8 it was unusual not to need any support.
 9 I mean, actually, I should explain how these
 10 incidents work. I mean, sometimes, actually, local
 11 authorities don't need central government support, and,
 12 in fact, in the first few days, I think it's really
 13 important — or in the first few hours, in fact, it's
 14 really important to let local responders respond to the
 15 situation. So, in fact, as central government, you can
 16 quite often confuse the situation if you become involved
 17 really early on, because actually you might make
 18 decisions or make directions without an understanding of
 19 the local area that might then prove to be quite
 20 damaging later on.
 21 So I think the way the Civil Contingencies Act is
 22 set up is to give the responsibility to local responders
 23 who are familiar with the local area. There's
 24 a requirement for them to have plans in place and be
 25 trained. In the case of London, there should be some

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1 reassurance through the London Resilience operation that
2 plans are up to date and effective, and in fact London
3 Resilience is tried and tested in terms of responding to
4 incidents.

5 So quite often — which is why the SCG is
6 important — you will not need central government
7 involvement, particularly in the early stages. It can
8 get in the way of the situation. But it is really
9 important, if central government help is needed, that
10 the SCG feeds that up and there's a mechanism for them
11 to do that.

12 So if there are things happening on the ground which
13 central government may not be able to see because,
14 for example, we wouldn't be in the cordoned area or able
15 to get to some of the places where it was evident that
16 support was needed, actually what we need is for people
17 to be reporting that back and saying, "Actually, we do
18 need support with specifics". I mentioned funding
19 earlier, but I'm sure there were a number — in fact,
20 there were a number of other issues where central
21 government did then provide support.

22 Q. This information that Ms Dawes was telling you at this
23 time, as we can see in the statement here, do you know
24 where that information was coming from? Was it coming
25 from Mr Holgate directly?

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1 A. Yes, I believe he had told her that he didn't need any
2 support, but we discussed and I remember Melanie and
3 I saying that it would be helpful if we had a follow-up
4 call with Nicholas Holgate, just to probe that a bit
5 more and make sure, and make sure he knew what support
6 was on offer and that central government was here if he
7 needed it.

8 Q. Could I take you to {CLG00002877}, please. It should be
9 the middle email on the page.

10 Just to put it into context first, we can see there
11 at the bottom, this is the email at 9.07 that was sent
12 by Ms Dawes' office to Nicholas Holgate. In the middle
13 there, at 9.09, we can see a response from him to her
14 saying:

15 "Many thanks. Plenty of blue light resource
16 at present."

17 Is it your understanding that this was the
18 information Ms Dawes was relying on when she told you
19 that she had spoken and had contacted Mr Holgate who
20 wasn't asking for any support?

21 A. I'm not sure what — I know she'd had contact with him.
22 I'm not sure what she was referring to at that point.
23 But I do remember her being concerned, as was I, that we
24 should test this and speak to Mr Holgate direct.
25 I mean, you know, conscious that he and others will have

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1 been managing the incident; however, felt that it would
2 be helpful for us to ensure that he didn't need support.

3 Q. Would it surprise you if information that was being
4 relayed to you in the afternoon of 14 June was relying
5 on information that had been sent at 9.09 in the morning
6 of the 14th?

7 A. It wouldn't have surprised me. I mean, I think —
8 I mean, you know, I think Melanie had reached out to
9 Nicholas Holgate, he had said there was — he didn't
10 need any support. Actually, I think we both thought we
11 needed to have a follow-up conversation to make sure of
12 that. So I think we wouldn't have relied on just one
13 piece of information, hence me trying to speak to him
14 and having discussed with Melanie that I would do that.

15 Q. I would like to move on in time, then, to the evening of
16 14 June, the 7.30 SCG.

17 We can see here, if we go to {CLG00008048}, an email
18 that was sent at 9.28, 21.28, on 14 June, and it's
19 a read-out from the 7.30 SCG; is that right?

20 A. I believe so. Yes, I can see it now. Thank you.

21 Q. You can see in the subject line, "update", and then it
22 says, "Please see the latest update below".

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Did you consider that there was any issue with the
25 timing of receiving information about the SCG meeting

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1 that had started at 7.30 but that was only being
2 circulated at 9.28 that evening?

3 A. I don't remember being concerned about that. It was
4 7.30 in the evening, was the SCG meeting. It would
5 have — I'm not sure how long the meeting will have
6 lasted for. It may have been a while. I mean, that
7 information wasn't available to me. But my experience
8 of RED is that they reported back as soon as they were
9 able.

10 Q. We can see in this read-out, if we could go to page 2
11 {CLG00008048/2}, please, the very top of page 2, it
12 says:

13 "Still in emergency response but working towards
14 steady state so the formation of a parallel recovery
15 group will be considered first thing tomorrow, working
16 towards a potential handover tomorrow night."

17 Was there anything unusual about moving to
18 a handover the following day?

19 A. Well, I personally was very concerned about that, and
20 I remember discussing that with Katherine Richardson and
21 RED. It seemed very early to move that — to move to
22 recovery, bearing in mind the local authority would then
23 be leading that recovery. There seemed to me to still
24 be quite a lot of work for the emergency services to do.
25 I was concerned that the local authority, or any other

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1 resilience arrangements — local government resilience
 2 arrangement, would be able to — would be the right
 3 people to lead that at that point, and I was still
 4 wanting to speak to Nicholas Holgate. But I remember
 5 that I pushed back on that and asked, "Is that the right
 6 thing to do, to hand over to a recovery phase as early
 7 as tomorrow night?", as it says here, and you can see
 8 from the rest of the email that there is still quite
 9 a lot of — the emergency situation is still being
 10 managed. It seemed to me to be still very much in the
 11 response phase.
 12 Q. We can see there, just in the third paragraph down, that
 13 it says:
 14 "Vulnerable people and families have been given
 15 accommodation overnight (hotel) as a priority. This is
 16 44 families from the tower and 25 from the surrounding
 17 area. There is still a shortfall of accommodation."
 18 Did that concern you?
 19 A. Well, that was being dealt with by another part of the
 20 department, who I know were very concerned about that.
 21 Q. Do you consider that this was perhaps an indication that
 22 all was not well with the local authority?
 23 A. Well, I wanted to understand whether all was well with
 24 the local authority. I mean, it's very — I understand
 25 that, you know, it was a very challenging situation. As

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1 I say, another part of the department was dealing with
 2 that issue. I think there were concerns at that point
 3 about the housing ability of the local authority, but my
 4 main concern was — for my part of the department, was:
 5 are they able to lead a Recovery Gold, given that
 6 they're dealing with all of these other issues? It
 7 still seems to me to be in a response situation, and
 8 there's still concerns with other things that they need
 9 to sort out, such as accommodation.
 10 Q. Can you assist us with when these concerns that you had
 11 crystallised?
 12 A. So my concerns about whether they were ready to lead the
 13 recovery crystallised when I read this email and spoke
 14 to Katherine Richardson. I believe there was an email
 15 from me on the subject that hopefully you have in your
 16 records, asking whether it was the right time to move to
 17 local authority recovery.
 18 Q. I won't take you to that now, but would it be fair to
 19 say that you hadn't made any enquiries at this stage to
 20 action those concerns that you had that evening?
 21 A. So when I read this email, I spoke to
 22 Katherine Richardson, so I absolutely had made
 23 enquiries. The housing enquiries were being dealt with
 24 by another part of the department. So I suppose you
 25 have to look at mine and Helen MacNamara's statements

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1 together to see the full response of the department.
 2 But, yes, my particular concern was: were they ready to
 3 lead a recovery phase, given that they were still
 4 dealing with the emergency situation, and in particular
 5 housing vulnerable people and families, which seemed to
 6 be a priority for them. So I would have expected them
 7 to be focused on that. The response was still being led
 8 by the police. I wondered if it was the right time —
 9 I more than wondered if it was the right time, actually;
 10 I felt it was not the right time for them to be leading
 11 the recovery, and I raised this with
 12 Katherine Richardson and asked for that to be fed back
 13 through the Home Office and to the strategic command
 14 group, which I believe was done. I believe they didn't
 15 actually hand over the recovery at that point.
 16 Q. Could I ask this: aside from what's mentioned in this
 17 read-out, had you received any concerns outside of this
 18 SCG read-out about RBKC's response?
 19 A. So, no, personally I hadn't received any concerns about
 20 their response. I started to receive concerns the next
 21 day. But, as I said, I wasn't in the ministerial
 22 meeting, so most of the information was — the way the
 23 structure was set up was that the Home Office were the
 24 lead department, there was the ad hoc ministerial
 25 meetings, a lot of information was fed up through that

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1 route, RED were reporting in to that route. I wasn't at
 2 those meetings, so if things were raised at those
 3 meetings that weren't in the minutes, I wouldn't have
 4 necessarily been aware of them. But by the 15th,
 5 I certainly was becoming aware of several issues.
 6 Q. Let's then move to 15 June, please.
 7 I'd like to show you an email sent by
 8 Sir Jeremy Heywood at 9.12, please, at {CLG10009750}.
 9 It says this:
 10 "Lots of concern here that the [local authority] LA
 11 is not gripping the aftermath — re-housing etc.
 12 "Is that fair?
 13 "Should CLG second in some people to help?
 14 "Which of your Ministers is now gripping this
 15 tightly?"
 16 Were you made aware of this email?
 17 A. Not until later on that day.
 18 Q. Can you assist us with when that was later?
 19 A. It was later in the afternoon.
 20 Q. Would you agree that it was a matter of significance
 21 that the head of the civil service was contacting the
 22 Permanent Secretary of DCLG stating there were lots of
 23 concerns and asking who was gripping this?
 24 A. Well, it was a concern. I think both Melanie and I, at
 25 different points, when we saw the email, were very

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1 concerned about that. We were — I was still making
 2 efforts to talk to Nicholas Holgate. In the end
 3 I believe — I don't believe my office has given
 4 a statement, but I believe I asked my office to be very
 5 firm with his office that I needed to have
 6 a conversation with him.
 7 Q. You had his mobile number by this point, did you?
 8 A. I don't remember — I may have done and I may have tried
 9 to ring him. I remember that I couldn't get hold of
 10 him, so I felt the best route would be to contact his
 11 office and put a specific time in to speak to him,
 12 because I felt that that would be the best way to get
 13 hold of him, having not received a reply to my text
 14 message. And, as I say, I can't remember whether
 15 I tried to ring him or not, but I had definitely been
 16 trying to get in touch and having no response, so that's
 17 the route I went down.
 18 Q. Given the concerns that you say you had on the morning
 19 of 15 June, it would have been open to you, rather than
 20 waiting for a formal arrangement for a call, to
 21 telephone him directly. As you say, you had sent him
 22 a text message, he hadn't responded, but you could have
 23 picked up the phone and tried to ring him.
 24 A. I believe I may have done that. I don't believe I had
 25 any response, but I can't remember exactly. And, as

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1 I said, I hadn't been made aware of the real issues
 2 until the afternoon of — when a number of issues
 3 started to come together, actually, in the afternoon,
 4 including my conversation with Nicholas Holgate.
 5 Q. We'll come to that in due course.
 6 What did you make of the fact that the head of the
 7 civil service on the morning of 15 June had heard
 8 concerns, yet you had not through RED?
 9 A. Well, RED — it's a different role for RED. So, as
 10 I say, RED was resourced really to be the conduit
 11 between the SCG and central government. There were
 12 other people in contact with the local authority,
 13 particularly on the housing side. I believe there'd
 14 also been visits to the area, so other people would have
 15 been picking up information. That should have been fed
 16 through the strategic command group. I mean, if issues
 17 were that obvious and the local authority wasn't
 18 gripping the aftermath, and particularly the housing,
 19 then that should have been fed up through the strategic
 20 command group. I would imagine it was also being fed
 21 up — if it had gone to Jeremy Heywood, it would have
 22 been fed up through the chain to the part of the
 23 department that was concerned with rehousing, and I know
 24 there was a lot of activity going on in that part of the
 25 department. But, actually, that wasn't my area of

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1 responsibility.
 2 So I imagine the feedback — this type of email
 3 would have been fed in through the housing part of the
 4 department to make sure that support was being offered
 5 in terms of rehousing, and in fact I later learned that
 6 support was offered in terms of rehousing, but not
 7 taken, because I was asked to follow that up personally
 8 when I visited RBKC.
 9 Q. Would it be fair to say, Dr Farrar, that there was
 10 an issue with your situational awareness at this point,
 11 then?
 12 A. So my personal situational awareness? So, yes, I ...
 13 well, I think I'll say ... the awareness that I had
 14 I think was the information that I needed to know,
 15 because there was a — the response in the department
 16 was being led elsewhere. So I think there's
 17 a difference between my situational awareness as the
 18 person not leading for DCLG and the awareness of the
 19 department. I think the department's awareness was
 20 probably high, but my role was not leading the housing
 21 and rehousing effort and assuring myself that the local
 22 authority was able to lead the housing and rehousing
 23 effort. That was a responsibility of DCLG, and there
 24 was a lot of activity in that area, but that wasn't in
 25 my particular area.

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1 Q. So the fact that there were concerns about the local
 2 authority not gripping the aftermath, you say that that
 3 is not something that was your concern, that you should
 4 have known about?
 5 A. And I did know about it. So this was — so I did
 6 receive a copy of this email later on and information of
 7 this type, because I was speaking to Nicholas Holgate
 8 and also visiting the local authority. I think in
 9 these — in emergency situations, it's really important
 10 that you have a command and control structure and people
 11 aren't trying to do things that it's not their
 12 responsibility. It needs to feed in through this
 13 ministerial group and the lead government department so
 14 the whole response is managed, and that was happening.
 15 All I'm saying is that, actually, my role in that part
 16 was limited, although I had an interest in local
 17 government and in whether they could lead the recovery.
 18 And I think Jeremy Heywood's email, if you look at it,
 19 is really referring to the housing and rehousing effort,
 20 of which I was very aware that there were big concerns,
 21 and knew that that was being dealt with by some really
 22 competent people in a different part of the department.
 23 Q. I'd like to move on to 9.30 on 15 June.
 24 A briefing took place with the Secretary of State,
 25 the housing and planning minister, Alok Sharma,

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1 Melanie Dawes and others from DCLG, and the briefing was
2 again conducted by Katherine Richardson and you
3 attended; is that right?
4 A. I believe so.
5 Q. Was this email from Jeremy Heywood discussed at this
6 meeting?
7 A. I don't remember. The housing situation was certainly
8 discussed at the meeting.
9 Q. Let's look at paragraph 40 of your first witness
10 statement, please, that's at page 8 {CLG00030414/8}.
11 Just to give you some context, at paragraph 39
12 you're talking about the 9.30 meeting, and then at
13 paragraph 40 you say this:
14 "At 10.36am I provided an update to Vince Kiddell,
15 the private secretary of Melanie Dawes, based on the
16 information I had been given by RED in a verbal update."
17 Can you assist us with whether this was a verbal
18 update you had received at the 9.30 briefing or is this
19 a separate update that you had received after it?
20 A. It was both.
21 Q. So the verbal update happened at the briefing?
22 A. So there was a verbal update at the briefing and I spoke
23 to Katherine Richardson afterwards as well.
24 Q. We can see the actions arising from that if we go to
25 {CLG00003125}. It's 15 June at 9.30, "Actions from

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1 [Secretary of State] update meeting", "Immediate
2 response today":
3 "Understanding from the SCG that there are enough
4 accommodation places for 100% of displaced people,
5 including a list of how many places have been offered by
6 each borough."
7 It then goes on to talk about trauma work.
8 What discussion gave rise to this action?
9 A. Sorry, remind me which action?
10 Q. Where it says here the understanding — the immediate
11 response, an understanding from the SCG on the number of
12 accommodation places for 100% of displaced people.
13 A. Yes. So, I mean — so that's — that wasn't an action,
14 that was a comment from the SCG, who were saying there
15 was enough accommodation places for 100% of displaced
16 people —
17 Q. Would that comment not have given rise to an action that
18 it was for those to find out what was going on?
19 A. So, I mean, the way that local responses are organised
20 is that, actually, in the — if we go back to the Civil
21 Contingencies Act, that the local responders are
22 responsible for making sure that the response is
23 adequate and feeding up to central government if it's
24 not adequate. So I imagine the question was asked
25 whether there were enough accommodation places and the

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1 SCG were reassuring that there were enough accommodation
2 places.
3 I would go back to my earlier point that it's just
4 so important that the strategic command groups are
5 feeding back really accurate information and saying when
6 they need support. As I said, central government at the
7 time was not — well, and still isn't — a category 1
8 responder, isn't therefore leading the response on the
9 ground, can sometimes get in the way if it tries to lead
10 the response on the ground when somebody else is leading
11 it who understands the borough, but the important thing
12 is that we receive accurate information from those local
13 responders. Everybody should be working together to
14 make sure that the people affected, who are the absolute
15 primary concern, are supported and have their needs met,
16 so making sure that there is accommodation for 100% of
17 displaced people. I think I've learnt since that there
18 wasn't. Really important that we receive that
19 information as soon as possible so we are able to help.
20 Q. I'd like to turn to, please, conversations that you had
21 at 10.36 on 15 June. We've referred to it already; it
22 was an update on the response to Melanie Dawes'
23 private secretary based on information that you'd been
24 given by RED — you say this in your statement — from
25 a verbal update.

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1 We can see it here at {CLG00003102}. So this is
2 an update that you had provided that is being emailed
3 from Ms Dawes' office to her, "RBKC update from Jo",
4 10.36:
5 "There was a quick [response] in terms of providing
6 temporary accommodation last night.
7 " ■ The task for today and tomorrow is finding more
8 permanent homes.
9 " ■ Our team is in contact with the Director of
10 Housing who is holding a meeting and will report back
11 after 11am.
12 " ■ There is a strategic co-ordinating group at 11am
13 where this will be discussed. Our staff are on this
14 group."
15 Did you consider this information to be at odds with
16 the information that you had received following the 7.30
17 SCG the night before, where we saw earlier that there
18 was a shortfall of accommodation?
19 A. So this was the — I believe — so this would have been
20 an update from RED taken from the next SCG. So the
21 information from the local responders was that there was
22 a quick — this is a factual note of what I'd been told,
23 these aren't my judgements. So what I was told, and
24 I believe it came from the SCG meeting, that there was
25 a quick response in terms of providing temporary

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1 accommodation, that people today and tomorrow were
 2 thinking of permanent homes. The team in MHCLG, or
 3 DCLG, which was in a different part of the department,
 4 were in contact with the director of housing, as they
 5 were — they had a meeting the next day, but were also
 6 in contact with them — they were going to report back
 7 after 11 o'clock, and then there was another SCG at
 8 11.00 am, and RED were on that group.
 9 I mean — so I think — so this is a factual report
 10 back for me. In emergencies I feel, and in fact it's
 11 good practice, when you receive information, to jot down
 12 what you're being told and that that is put on the
 13 record.
 14 Q. Well, you say that this is a factual note; did you
 15 question the information that you were being given by
 16 Katherine Richardson here?
 17 A. So I — so, no, not at this point. I was gathering
 18 information from her for — in terms of what was said at
 19 the SCG. As I say, the main concerns that I was aware
 20 of were related to housing, which — I'm sorry to keep
 21 saying this, but which were being dealt with, I know
 22 very proactively, by some very competent people in the
 23 rest of the department. So my trust was with them to be
 24 actually following up on those issues and making sure
 25 that they were reporting back, and they were reporting

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1 back into ministerial meetings, and in fact the director
 2 general for that area was on the ad hoc ministerial —
 3 attended the ad hoc ministerial group as well, given
 4 that housing was their main concern.
 5 MS MALHOTRA: Mr Chairman, I haven't finished this, but
 6 I think now is a convenient moment.
 7 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: That suits you, does it?
 8 MS MALHOTRA: Yes.
 9 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right.
 10 Well, Dr Farrar, as you know, we have a break during
 11 the morning. We'll take it now. We'll stop there and
 12 come back, please, at 11.35, and this is the first break
 13 in your evidence, so I have to ask you, please, not to
 14 talk to anyone about your evidence or anything relating
 15 to it while you're out of the room. All right?
 16 THE WITNESS: I won't.
 17 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much. Would you go
 18 with the usher, please.
 19 (Pause)
 20 Thank you. 11.35, then, please. Thank you.
 21 (11.20 am)
 22 (A short break)
 23 (11.35 am)
 24 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, Dr Farrar, ready to carry
 25 on, I hope?

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1 THE WITNESS: Yes.
 2 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you.
 3 Yes, Ms Malhotra.
 4 MS MALHOTRA: Thank you.
 5 Could I just clarify one matter with you, Dr Farrar.
 6 You were talking earlier in your evidence about the
 7 response and the recovery phases, and you mentioned that
 8 the response phase was the emergencies services would be
 9 involved, and the recovery phase came later.
 10 I just wanted to clarify, you're not suggesting that
 11 the local authority didn't have any responsibilities in
 12 the response phase, are you?
 13 A. Oh, no, absolutely not. They're a category 1 responder
 14 and are on the strategic command group, so should be
 15 part of the feedback to central government.
 16 Q. As you will be well aware, there would be
 17 responsibilities on the local authority as a category 1
 18 responder to set up rest centres, for example.
 19 A. Rest centres, housing, responding to anything that falls
 20 within their responsibility, yes. So they would have
 21 been a big part of the response, actually. They just
 22 weren't leading, and weren't chairing.
 23 Q. And there isn't a clear dividing line between response
 24 and recovery, the two run in tandem; is that right?
 25 A. No, I mean, there is a dividing line, so there's

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1 a response phase and, at a point, the response phase is
 2 handed over to recovery, and that's a separate phase.
 3 So actually, yes, there is an element of things running
 4 in tandem, because people want to be ready to lead the
 5 response, so they'll need to make sure that their
 6 structures are set up, but there should be a clear
 7 handover point, and I think that was referred to in some
 8 of the emails, where the Gold Commander or the strategic
 9 command group commander was suggesting that they would
 10 be handing over to the local authority as part of the
 11 recovery phase.
 12 Q. Thank you for clarifying that.
 13 I wonder if I could take you to {CLG00003099},
 14 please. It's the second email in the chain at 10.20.
 15 I appreciate these are emails that you were not
 16 copied in to, but I wonder if you might be able to help
 17 us with some of the context.
 18 15 June, 10.20, an email from Jenny Shellens. Is
 19 that a member of RED?
 20 A. I'm not sure, actually.
 21 Q. And it's from her to Philip James, I hope you can accept
 22 from me — well, if we go down to the bottom of page 2,
 23 we can see Jenny Shellens was a member of the resilience
 24 and emergencies division.
 25 A. Yes, thanks.

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1 Q. And Philip James, I believe, was the GLO for that day.
 2 In this email, there are a number of asks, and I'll
 3 just read it out:
 4 "I know you are joining the SCG at 11 today. I will
 5 include your read-out in the briefing for this
 6 afternoon's Ministerial so as you would expect we'll be
 7 wanting it as soon as you can.
 8 "A couple of areas that it would help us for you to
 9 probe on if it is not completely clear:
 10 "The number of residents displaced — we were awarded
 11 an action to clarify this at yesterday's meeting. My
 12 line currently read like this ..."
 13 She then goes on to set out what the lines on it
 14 are.
 15 Over the page, at page 2 {CLG00003099/2}, she says:
 16 "The temporary accommodation arrangements — again we
 17 were given an action to liaise with RBKC. We've had an
 18 update from LRP [London Resilience Partnership] and also
 19 homelessness team are talking to the RBKC team. But it
 20 would be useful to add any intelligence you can along
 21 the lines of:
 22 "— Are we satisfied that everyone who wants
 23 accommodation has it?
 24 "— When do we think those from surrounding area (who
 25 are in the rest centre) will be able to return home?"

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1 "— Are we satisfied that RBKC has a grip on this?"
 2 We can then see, if we go up in the email chain
 3 {CLG00003099/1}, at 10.28, Lynne Dowdican, who was
 4 a resilience adviser, head of resilience, within RED,
 5 says the following in the second paragraph:
 6 "I can confirm I spoke to both Toby and Hamish
 7 [I believe they are London Resilience Group employees]
 8 this morning and on both calls they confirmed that the
 9 [local authority] have confidence that they [sic]
 10 temporary accommodation for all those that need it."
 11 Then she goes on to say:
 12 "They may give further reassurance on the SCG."
 13 Would you expect any concerns raised by a GLO who
 14 was attending the SCG to be documented in SCG minutes?
 15 A. I would expect issues — possibly. I think there are
 16 different levels of minutes. So the minutes that —
 17 yes, but yes, I would expect them, actually, to be
 18 recorded on SCG minutes, because the GLO is an important
 19 part of the SCG, and I know sometimes they're
 20 summarised, but yes, I certainly would expect that.
 21 Q. Could I take you to {LFB00119323}, please. Just to
 22 identify that these are the SCG minutes from the
 23 11 o'clock meeting on 15 June.
 24 If we go to page 4 {LFB00119323/4}, we can see
 25 there:

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1 "DCLG provided an update:
 2 "■ Following a ministerial meeting this AM,
 3 ministers were keen to provide help wherever possible,
 4 particularly in regards to accommodation."
 5 "Action 14: All to copy LRG [London Resilience
 6 Group] to any requests to DCLG."
 7 Would you have expected there to have been a note
 8 here that DCLG wanted information about numbers on those
 9 that were displaced?
 10 A. If — possibly. I mean, the minutes are summarised.
 11 I would have expected them to have noted if particular
 12 requests were made from DCLG, and I assume if they were
 13 asked to make those requests, they would have made them
 14 at the meeting. So, yes, I would have then expected it
 15 to be minuted.
 16 Q. I wonder if I could just clarify, you said that there
 17 were concerns emerging, and I think you said in your
 18 evidence that it was the afternoon of the 15th when
 19 concerns really came to the fore for you; is that right?
 20 A. That's right.
 21 Q. So at this stage, on the morning of the 15th, you knew
 22 that there were concerns about rehousing; is that right?
 23 A. Yes, and that was being dealt with by a different part
 24 of the department, and also being fed in through the
 25 command structure that government had set up — set in

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1 place.
 2 Q. Could I take you to {CLG00003112}, please, at 10.45. It
 3 should be the third email on the first page. We can see
 4 there an email from the office of the Secretary of
 5 State, and it says this:
 6 "No.10 have been in touch. During the [Secretary of
 7 State]'s phone call with the [Prime Minister] this
 8 morning, he gave assurances that DCLG have been working
 9 hard to ensure that there is a co-ordinated response to
 10 the incident. The PM would now like a briefing
 11 confirming this that (a) outlines what DCLG has done to
 12 ensure the response is co-ordinated (b) clearly states
 13 who and how many people we have on the ground and (c)
 14 sets out what DCLG's role is."
 15 So just pausing there for a moment, it seems as
 16 if — and would you agree with this — the
 17 Prime Minister was seeking reassurance from the
 18 Secretary of State that DCLG was in control and ensuring
 19 that there was a co-ordinated response? Would you agree
 20 with that?
 21 A. Well, I wouldn't agree that it's asking if DCLG was in
 22 control; it's asking: is DCLG ensuring that the response
 23 is co-ordinated?
 24 Q. And so would it be fair to say from that that there was
 25 an assumption that it would be DCLG's responsibility to

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1 ensure that that response was co-ordinated on the
2 ground?
3 A. And we — and I think that would refer to the response
4 stage of the incident, that we were all concerned that,
5 actually, the response stage was effective and
6 co-ordinated.
7 Q. Did the fact that questions were now being asked at the
8 highest level in the form of the Prime Minister make you
9 review the response that was happening at the time?
10 A. Well, that was being done, as I say, through the kind of
11 organisational structure that central government had put
12 in place, and so I'm absolutely sure that people would
13 have been very concerned about that. My primary issue
14 of concern was making sure that the council was able to
15 lead the response phase. So I'm looking at these emails
16 through a different lens.
17 So there's a whole system looking at the
18 Prime Ministerial concerns and issues, and issues and
19 actions raised through the ministerial group, of which
20 I wasn't a part. But I'm thinking about the handover of
21 the response phase to RBKC and/or London Resilience, and
22 that was my concern, making sure that actually what
23 would be quite a long and difficult response was going
24 to be properly managed.
25 I mean, I think it's quite normal for departments to

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1 split responsibilities and make sure that the people who
2 are overseeing those areas are proactively thinking
3 about what's happening in the next stage.
4 So that's why on the 15th, although all these
5 issues — the department was aware of all these issues
6 and involved in them and providing the briefing that was
7 requested here, I was looking at it through the lens of:
8 does this mean that the council won't be able to lead
9 the response? And that's what I was really concerned to
10 find out.
11 Q. So we can see here that there is a concern and that
12 there is reassurance that is being sought, and that the
13 Prime Minister is asking "how many people we have on the
14 ground"; can you assist us with how many people from
15 DCLG were on the ground at that stage?
16 A. No, I can't. That would have been being managed through
17 the structures that I've already mentioned.
18 Q. Could we go next to {CLG00030477/2}. It should be
19 an email at 8.45. We can see here, 15 June, 8.45, this
20 is an email from Nicholas Hurd, the Minister of State
21 for Policing and the Fire Service, his office, to the
22 office of the Secretary of State.
23 In the second bullet point there, it says:
24 "The Minister has been told that there is an urgent
25 issue with access to cash for former residents of

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1 Grenfell Tower. He's also been told via Margot James MP
2 (BEIS Minister) that the Post Office — there is local
3 one just around the corner from the tower, have offered
4 to facilitate access to money for residents. He would
5 be really grateful if your teams were able to facilitate
6 a link between the Post Office and the local Council so
7 that they can make people aware."
8 Then the final bullet point:
9 "There have also been a couple of concerns raised
10 with him about the quality of the sleeping materials
11 that were available for people last night and asked if
12 there was anything HMG [Her Majesty's Government] could
13 do to help the Council upgrade?"
14 I would like to then go to another email in this
15 chain at 10.45 {CLG00030477/1}. It's the next email up.
16 This time Katherine Richardson from DCLG RED is cc'd in,
17 and it says this:
18 "On the question about emergency access to cash for
19 residents of Grenfell Tower, the CEO of the Post Office
20 (Paula Vennells) has called the Minister direct to offer
21 support. The Leader of the RBKC Council suggested that
22 his CEO, Nicholas Holgate would be the right person for
23 the Post Office to engage with.
24 "The Minister is keen that i) someone from
25 [Her Majesty's Government] speaks to the CEO of the

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1 [Post Office] and ii) link is made to the Council and
2 that residents are able to access money as soon as
3 possible unless there are already alternative
4 arrangements in place?
5 "I would be happy to facilitate but I don't want to
6 tread on toes/upset your procedures and your
7 relationship with the Council?"
8 So we can see here that concerns are being fed back
9 to RED on the morning of 15 June; is that right?
10 A. Specific issues are being fed back to RED through that
11 command structure, and I can see here that RED is
12 responding to those.
13 Can you tell me who the James is in the —
14 Q. I believe that's the office of the private secretary to
15 the Minister of State.
16 A. Okay, thank you. Thank you.
17 Q. I believe.
18 If we go up in the email chain, at 10.54 on 15 June
19 we can see, a short time later — so this is then sent
20 to your office:
21 "Another email to be aware of from the Home Office.
22 Nick Hurd is keen that i) someone from [Her Majesty's
23 Government] speaks to the CEO of the Post Office on the
24 provision of emergency cash for Grenfell Tower residents
25 and ii) follows up with the Council to ensure that

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1 residents are able to access money as soon as possible
2 unless there are already alternative arrangements in
3 place. Are you okay to pick up with the Council on
4 these points alongside other points today?"

5 Then at 11.02 we can see an email that says at the
6 bottom, the last sentence:

7 "Jo will get in touch with Nick Holgate."

8 Is that right?

9 A. Yes. I was — at that point, as you know, I was trying
10 to get in touch with Nick Holgate. So I think —
11 I mean — so what happens in these situations is that
12 you have the lead — as I say, the lead department and
13 the ministerial group, the ad hoc ministerial group.
14 There will be a number of actions that come from that
15 group. They can — they are then taken by different
16 people across government and then re—fed back in to that
17 group to make sure that they are co—ordinated and that
18 they are leading to the outcome that you want. So,
19 actually, as I was speaking to Nicholas Holgate already,
20 I was asked to pick up other points, so particularly the
21 issue about accessing money, with him.

22 Q. Well, could I take you to your first witness statement,
23 please. That's page 9 {CLG00030414/9} at paragraph 42,
24 where you say this, it's the first part of the
25 paragraph:

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1 "By Thursday, I was aware from conversations I had
2 had and from meetings I had been to that there were
3 concerns in relation to the way in which RBKC was
4 handling the rehousing effort. Any wider concerns in
5 relation to the coordination of the emergency response
6 itself were not drawn to my attention at this stage."

7 Do you still stand by that statement, considering
8 the email exchanges that you've just seen?

9 A. Yes, because actually that — they're about offers of
10 help and they're about me asking the council: have
11 residents been able to access support? So there weren't
12 concerns at that point about — raised with me about how
13 the council was co—ordinating the response or whether
14 they were accessing the things that they needed to act.
15 The big concerns that had been fed back were about the
16 way that RBKC was handling the housing of residents at
17 that point.

18 Q. So is it fair to say, then, that you didn't consider the
19 issue of bedding to be a concern?

20 A. So I didn't — and maybe I should have done, but
21 I didn't see the email relating to bedding, because
22 I absolutely think the issue of bedding is a concern,
23 and that's one of the things — the first things that
24 I noticed on the Friday when I attended the
25 Westway Centre. So had I picked up on that email that

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1 said about bedding, then that — as someone who's
2 managed emergency response, that would have raised a big
3 question in my mind, actually, about the rest centre,
4 because I would have been very surprised, and I was very
5 surprised on the Friday, to see that the rest centre
6 wasn't set up in the way that I would normally expect
7 a rest centre to be set up, from my local government
8 experience, not from my central government —

9 Q. We'll come on to that.

10 I don't want there to be any confusion about this.
11 Perhaps we could just go back to that email again, then,
12 please, {CLG00030477}. In the second email in the chain
13 at 10.54, it shows in the subject line that this was
14 forwarded to you. Is it forwarded to your office?

15 A. It's forwarded to my office, and so I didn't always pick
16 up every email from my office. I also had a direct
17 email address. I could pick up emails to my office, but
18 I — I believe, but that wasn't routine. My office
19 would forward on emails that — for me to see, because
20 obviously there's a huge volume of emails.

21 Q. So your evidence is that you didn't see that, the
22 reference to the bedding?

23 A. So I — well, I think — so absolutely, so I didn't see
24 the reference, and I'd be very apologetic if I had seen
25 that email and not picked that up, because that seems to

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1 me to be really significant, and I'm sure if I had seen
2 that I would have picked it up.

3 Q. I'd like to turn, then, to your conversation with
4 Mr Holgate, which you say in your statement
5 {CLG00030414/10} — we don't need to go to it now —
6 took place at about 12.30 on 15 June; is that right?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. As we have heard, at the time — and we saw it in
9 an email that Melanie Dawes sent early on the 14th —
10 you were at that stage leading on the support for RBKC;
11 is that right?

12 A. Leading on the support — I was the lead contact,
13 I think. I would have been the lead contact for the
14 chief executive.

15 Q. Do you consider it satisfactory that this was the first
16 time that you were both speaking?

17 A. No, and in fact I had really wanted to speak to him the
18 day before, and had made every effort to speak to him,
19 actually.

20 Q. Do you consider that maybe that was an indicator that
21 something was amiss?

22 A. Yes, absolutely, and one of the reasons that Melanie and
23 I discussed whether it would be good to visit and speak
24 to Nicholas Holgate directly, but absolutely.

25 Now, I know people are busy and managing a response.

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1 My own experience of managing responses is actually the
 2 contact from central government tends to be at deputy
 3 director or director level. If a director general,
 4 I think, from central government had wanted to speak to
 5 me as the chief executive, personally I would have taken
 6 that seriously and would have wanted to speak to them
 7 quite quickly. And in fact, you know, the contact from
 8 the Permanent Secretary to Nicholas Holgate, I'm very
 9 surprised there was only a brief response. When you're
 10 managing these incidents, they are busy, but there's
 11 a command structure in place. So, you know, the Silver
 12 group underneath you are managing the response, you come
 13 together as a Gold Group at intervals; there are spaces
 14 in between where I would have personally made sure that
 15 I had made contact with the department. I would have
 16 seen the director general, and particularly the
 17 Permanent Secretary, to be people that I would have
 18 wanted to speak to.
 19 Q. So we're now at the stage where you do speak to him.
 20 Can you tell us what was discussed?
 21 A. So I made a note of what was discussed. I don't know if
 22 we'd be able to see that. I felt it was really
 23 important just to jot down the main points that he said
 24 during the conversation.
 25 Q. I think we do have that, and I believe it's

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1 {CLG00008140}.
 2 A. Yes, that's it. So — and this will have been — just
 3 to explain the context. So as it was an emergency
 4 situation, I felt it was important to note down the
 5 points that he raised. As I said with an earlier email,
 6 this is — these are the points that he made, they're
 7 not my assessment of how he is performing. So these are
 8 the points that Nicholas Holgate told me in that
 9 discussion.
 10 Q. So let's work through this, then.
 11 It's an email from Ms Dawes' office on 15 June 2017
 12 at 4.26 to DCLG and others within DCLG, and it says at
 13 the bottom there:
 14 "Jo Farrar call with Nick Holgate, 12.30,
 15 15 June ..."
 16 Was this your note?
 17 A. So, yes, I wrote a handwritten note and my office typed
 18 it up, so this is my office's transcript of my
 19 handwritten note.
 20 Q. We can see there the first bullet point:
 21 "They have found hotel accommodation for anyone with
 22 need. He thinks that can roll over for as long as
 23 needed."
 24 A. Yeah, so that's Nicholas Holgate. In fact, I have to
 25 say he was very confident in the conversation I had with

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1 him. So I knew there were concerns about housing, I'd
 2 been asked to raise housing with him, particularly the
 3 temporary accommodation, so that was the first point we
 4 discussed. He told me that there was hotel
 5 accommodation for everybody who needed it. But we'll
 6 talk about my visit the next day, but clearly the next
 7 day there were people without hotel accommodation.
 8 I mean, possibly it would have been made available to
 9 them, I don't know, but there were still people who were
 10 not in hotels.
 11 Q. Just —
 12 A. But we can come back to that. But his reassurance on
 13 that day was that they'd found hotel accommodation for
 14 everybody with need, and he thinks that this can
 15 continue for as long as the hotel accommodation is
 16 needed, so people won't then be moved from those hotels,
 17 which would have been another point of concern.
 18 Q. Could I just pause you there for a moment, because we
 19 can see further down:
 20 "845 non—Grenfell Tower households are currently
 21 without access to their homes. Most are making their
 22 own arrangements. They are looking at when police and
 23 fire can reduce the size of the cordon.
 24 " ■ Grenfell Tower residents have been complaining
 25 for a long time ..."

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1 We will come on to that in a moment, but did you
 2 consider that there was a discrepancy here?
 3 A. Yes. Well, I thought there were several discrepancies,
 4 and so after the conversation with Nicholas Holgate,
 5 Melanie and I discussed whether it would be appropriate
 6 for me to visit, given my knowledge of local government
 7 and having been involved in these situations. So
 8 although I wasn't part of the direct response, having
 9 spoken to him and not having — you know, having
 10 a number of things that seemed to be of concern or
 11 discrepancies, following this we discussed whether
 12 I should actually visit the site.
 13 I mean, there had been visits by other people,
 14 obviously, and they had been co—ordinated by the
 15 ministerial group, and it's important — I mean, it
 16 wouldn't be appropriate for me to just turn up, but we
 17 both felt that there might be value, given this
 18 conversation.
 19 Q. You've mentioned that that's one discrepancy.
 20 A. Yeah.
 21 Q. Can you tell us what the other discrepancies were?
 22 A. So — and there are a couple of things. So I'm not —
 23 I think the note might go on to the next page, so
 24 I might ask you to — but it may not. Could ...
 25 Q. It goes over on to page 2.

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1 A. Okay, so maybe we'll come on to page 2 in a minute, but
 2 if I just cover anything on this page first of all.
 3 So, first of all, the comments on housing weren't
 4 exactly aligned with other comments that we'd been
 5 hearing through the ministerial groups.
 6 You mentioned the number of people that had been
 7 displaced, but the reassurance that hotels had been
 8 found for everybody with need.
 9 I was a bit worried about — I didn't really
 10 understand — tried to probe but didn't really
 11 understand the comments about people making things worse
 12 than it is, and I think my biggest concern is probably
 13 on page 2 {CLG00008140/2} where —
 14 Q. Well, let's go to that, shall we?
 15 A. Yeah, where he's saying:
 16 "There is plenty of support from DCLG and others."
 17 Well, I knew DCLG was offering support on housing;
 18 I wasn't entirely sure that all that support had been
 19 taken up.
 20 I specifically asked him about London Resilience,
 21 which I didn't note on here, and he said that there was
 22 support from London Resilience. But actually, you know,
 23 I'm not sure that there was. And I question the word
 24 "support", because it became clear to me in this call
 25 that Nicholas Holgate was holding the Gold role for

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1 the council. There didn't seem to be the normal London
 2 Resilience rotation that you would normally see.
 3 Q. There's a lot of information there. If I could just
 4 break it down.
 5 A. Yeah, of course. Sorry.
 6 Q. You say support; did you offer support?
 7 A. Mm, twice during that conversation. So earlier on
 8 I asked him if he needed any support, he said no, and
 9 then right at the end I came back to it and asked him
 10 again if he needed support, and he very confidently told
 11 me — and these were his words — "There is plenty of
 12 support from DCLG and others".
 13 Q. What was your reaction to that?
 14 A. Well, I was surprised —
 15 Q. Why were you surprised?
 16 A. — which is why I came back to it the second time.
 17 Well, to be honest, I would have thought that
 18 even — you know, we raised the funding issue. There
 19 would have been a need for emergency funding, so ...
 20 Now, Nicholas seemed — I mean, he was obviously
 21 managing the situation, he didn't have a long time for
 22 the call, so there was some concerns for me and
 23 I reflected on them afterwards, discussed this with
 24 Melanie, and wondered if we should ... whether I —
 25 there could be some value in me visiting, even though

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1 others from DCLG and ministerial visits were taking
 2 place, whether there would be value in me, as a former
 3 chief executive, going to see Nicholas Holgate, but also
 4 given my role as director general for local government,
 5 whether that would be useful.
 6 Q. You say that you offered support twice during that call.
 7 Did he accept it? I assume not, given what you said.
 8 A. No, no, he was very confident that they didn't — that
 9 they had all the support they needed. Yeah.
 10 Q. Was he hostile to the idea of central government
 11 support?
 12 A. No, he didn't seem hostile, just seemed very confident
 13 that it wasn't needed. It seemed to me that he was
 14 trying to provide reassurance that they had everything
 15 that they needed.
 16 Q. Did you press him on this on the call?
 17 A. Yes, I asked him twice. Yes, I asked him twice, because
 18 I was surprised, so I asked him twice, and that's why we
 19 also thought that a visit might then be useful.
 20 It's quite hard to really delve into things in
 21 a telephone call where somebody is rushed and obviously
 22 dealing with a really big emergency, so I thought it
 23 would be good to just see him.
 24 Q. Did you consider encouraging him to take that offer of
 25 support that you were offering in the call?

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1 A. I believe I did. I believe I'd said, you know, "We're
 2 happy to support in any way that you want".
 3 Q. Did you specify the nature of the support that central
 4 government could offer?
 5 A. I'm not sure I did, no.
 6 Q. I'd like to take you to Mr Holgate's evidence, that's
 7 {Day273/157:13}, I believe. So it's Day 273,
 8 page 154(sic), line 13.
 9 So Mr Holgate is asked here:
 10 "Question: Now, according to Jo Farrar, who was the
 11 director general for local government and public
 12 services at DCLG at the time —
 13 "Answer: Yeah."
 14 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: I'm sorry, I don't seem to have that
 15 on my screen. Do you have it on yours?
 16 A. No, I have a different page.
 17 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: No, I thought so.
 18 MS MALHOTRA: 157 should be the page, forgive me. Thank
 19 you.
 20 A. Thank you.
 21 Q. Can you see there at line 13 it starts?
 22 A. Yes, I can.
 23 Q. He is asked about your statement and what you say at
 24 paragraph 44 of your statement, and I'll pick up at the
 25 bottom of page 157:

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1 "Question: 'At 12.30pm [that's the time she puts on
2 it] I spoke to Nicholas Holgate. I had contacted him
3 the previous day, but this was the first time he was
4 available to speak to me. Amongst other things, we
5 discussed the rehousing effort, the involvement of
6 London Resilience Partnership, emergency financial aid
7 and counselling support.'
8 "Just pausing there, do you remember that? Do you
9 remember discussing those matters?
10 "Answer: Not very well, but very happy to accept
11 her account.
12 "Question: She goes on to say:
13 "'I restated the Department's broad offer of
14 assistance; he reiterated that RBKC had plenty of
15 support from the Department and others, including
16 volunteers and colleagues from other local authorities,
17 and indicated in general terms that the Council was
18 managing well.'
19 "Do you recall saying those things?
20 "Answer: Well, I think I was at the edge of
21 thinking that at the time. I'd be surprised if I was
22 quite that confident with her, because, you know, there
23 were contraindications. So — and I wouldn't have
24 wanted to give her a sort of falsely optimistic picture,
25 frankly.

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1 "Question: Right. She goes on to say:
2 "'I twice raised the issue of whether RBKC needed
3 support, but he was firm in his assurances that no
4 further support was needed.'
5 "Answer: Well, yes.
6 "Question: Is that right?
7 "Answer: I suspect that I did not have a specific
8 requirement of her for further support."
9 He then goes on, and I'll pick it up at line 14
10 {Day273/159:14}. The question is:
11 "Question: Would you say that, from the
12 conversation, that was an unreasonable impression and
13 she'd got the wrong end of the stick?
14 "Answer: Well, I think that it is true, given the
15 offers of support from other boroughs and volunteers and
16 the Red Cross and suchlike, that we did have plenty of
17 support. We did not have, one can say with certainty
18 with hindsight, sufficient support. But I think it was
19 as much about the [bridging] of the support that we had
20 as opposed to the quantum."
21 You have seen there what Mr Holgate had to say; what
22 do you say to that?
23 A. Well, actually I'm surprised that he didn't make a note
24 of the conversation, actually, as I did. I think if
25 you're a Gold Commander, as part of your training,

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1 there's an expectation that you will keep a log, so
2 I would have thought that he would have a log of the
3 conversation.
4 But — and, you know, I mean, he was in the middle,
5 obviously, of a really difficult situation for anyone to
6 manage, but in my recollection — and it was a telephone
7 call, so I didn't have the benefit of body language, but
8 my recollection was that he was very confident, and very
9 confident that he didn't need support from DCLG or
10 others.
11 Q. Let's go to {CLG00008230}, please. It's the first email
12 on the page at 8.40. We can see there, it's your office
13 emailing the office of Ms Dawes:
14 "I'm due to speak to the [chief executive] today and
15 will ask him about extra support. He was quite clear
16 yesterday that he did not feel the need for this, but
17 I will try again and I think if we can persuade the
18 Housing Director to have some housing support, that
19 could be helpful. Katherine, I am not sure if we could
20 ask the Home Office if we should extend the victim
21 support unit to help the Council. Could you look at
22 this."
23 So is it fair to say that the following morning you
24 send an email confirming that you had spoken to him,
25 offered him support, which he had declined —

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1 A. Yes.
2 Q. — and said he did not feel the need for it?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. Why was there a need to persuade the housing director to
5 take on housing support?
6 A. I think I'd had an email — so, I mean, going back to
7 earlier comments that I made, to put this in context,
8 there were concerns from the housing side of the
9 department that they weren't taking the offers of
10 support that they needed, and there was more that
11 central government and, by this time it was becoming
12 clear, that there was more that other councils might be
13 able to do to help them. I think the offer from the
14 department was we could embed some permanent housing
15 support in their housing team, which would seem
16 eminently sensible to me, because if there was need for
17 additional funding from central government, for example,
18 or anything else on housing support, if you had someone
19 embedded in the team, then they would be able to report
20 back in a different way to RED through the SCG. They
21 would have a more detailed understanding of housing and
22 what was needed and what could be drawn on. So that
23 would seem to me to be eminently sensible.
24 And I think there was an email from Helen MacNamara
25 saying we would need to look at it, but asking if

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1 I could follow up because they hadn't accepted the offer
 2 of support, and I know that she asked me, if I could, to
 3 also go to the meeting that Alok Sharma was having with
 4 the housing director and the lead member for housing and
 5 perhaps offer that support.
 6 Q. Could we just go back to the email of the note of your
 7 conversation with Mr Holgate. That's {CLG00008140}.
 8 Before we do move on in time, I'd just like to pick up
 9 one or two further things from this read-out of yours,
 10 please.
 11 We've already been to it, it's the third bullet
 12 point up from the bottom:
 13 "Grenfell Tower residents have been complaining for
 14 a long time about the council. They have a trail of
 15 letters written to the council."
 16 In what context was he giving you this information?
 17 A. He said that related to the housing and to
 18 Grenfell Tower itself, from my recollection.
 19 Q. Did you form any opinion about why he was saying that to
 20 you?
 21 A. No, absolutely — no, in fact, no, I thought it was
 22 an odd thing to mention in the call.
 23 Q. The next bullet point said:
 24 "Nick said several people could make this worse than
 25 it is and the council is worried that they might need

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1 assistance from the police."
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. What was the context to that?
 4 A. So I think he felt that — I mean, his opinion were that
 5 there were people that were agitating the situation.
 6 I mean, personally I felt that people would be agitated
 7 if there had been an incident of this size, and actually
 8 the job of the council is to provide reassurance to the
 9 community and to be visible to the community and to be
 10 really helping people who have been displaced, and
 11 I think sometimes in these incidents, you know, people
 12 are not going to be happy and they're going to — and
 13 people will be, well, more than unhappy, and as
 14 a council it's your responsibility to help to manage
 15 that, and help to make sure that people are supported.
 16 So I found that a bit surprising.
 17 Q. You say you found it a bit surprising; did you form any
 18 impression of his attitude?
 19 A. Not particularly. As I say, it was really hard. It was
 20 a very — it was a short telephone conversation.
 21 I wasn't able to see his body language. He was clearly
 22 worried about the safety of his staff. But, actually,
 23 you know, I haven't experienced — I have never led
 24 a situation as big as this, but I have led some fairly
 25 critical situations, and my experience is that,

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1 actually, what the community wants are people that they
 2 can talk to who can help them, and that is what is
 3 really needed in these situations.
 4 Q. We can see if we go over to page 2 {CLG00008140/2},
 5 please, the final paragraph before you go on to do
 6 a read-out of a conversation with the LGA, it says:
 7 "Regarding a Secretary of State visit: he said that
 8 councillors have been really good, and it would be great
 9 if Secretary of State could recognise them
 10 (Nicholas Paget Brown and cabinet members for
 11 regeneration). He suggested we give the leader the
 12 option of visiting with the Secretary of State."
 13 Did you consider this to be an appropriate request
 14 at this time?
 15 A. I thought — actually, I thought it was an odd request,
 16 because I thought if a Secretary of State is visiting,
 17 actually it's very natural for the leader of the council
 18 to meet the Secretary of State and do the visit with the
 19 Secretary of State. I mean, that would be usual. It
 20 seemed a bit odd to me at the time that he was asking if
 21 the leader could visit with the Secretary of State.
 22 But — I would have expected the leader to be there to
 23 see the Secretary of State, and in fact, you know, when
 24 we went the next day, the leader was there and ... yes,
 25 and I think himself had expected to be there.

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1 Q. What about his comment or what your note says here, that
 2 they should be recognised, councillors should be
 3 recognised? What was that about?
 4 A. Well, I felt that was a bit early to make that
 5 judgement, really. I mean, the response was still being
 6 dealt with, clearly, you know, there were a lot of
 7 people who had been displaced. It was a bit early to
 8 judge the performance of the council.
 9 Q. Did this give you any kind of indication about where
 10 Mr Holgate's priorities were at that time?
 11 A. So not really. It would be unfair to say it gave me
 12 an indication of his priorities. I mean, you know, I'm
 13 sure he was very concerned with doing the right thing.
 14 I just think this is a big situation for anyone to
 15 manage. But things that started to become clear at that
 16 point were kind of the lack of support he was taking,
 17 and particularly from London Resilience, because in
 18 previous incidents that have been managed in London,
 19 there's a very visible presence of London Resilience.
 20 So —
 21 Q. Well, let's just, on that point, on London Resilience,
 22 look at your second witness statement, please, at
 23 {CLG00030781/4}, paragraph 14. You say this:
 24 "As at 14 June ... it was my expectation that the
 25 LLAG resolution would be activated if it had not already

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1 been. During my telephone call with Nicholas Holgate at
 2 12.30 on 15 July ..."
 3 Do you mean 15 June?
 4 A. Sorry.
 5 Q. "... I asked him if the London Resilience partnership
 6 was involved. He confirmed it was. I did not ask, and
 7 he did not say, whether this was following formal
 8 activation of the LLAG resolution, though it was my
 9 assumption that it was."
 10 You then go on to say the note that you circulated.
 11 You didn't ask him about the LLAG arrangements; is
 12 that right?
 13 A. So I asked him if London Resilience Partnership was
 14 involved. It was my assumption that they would be
 15 involved, yes. So — and he confirmed that it was. But
 16 he said, "We have plenty" — he talked about support
 17 from London Resilience, rather than jointly managing the
 18 incident.
 19 With hindsight, I probably should have probed
 20 further on this. It was definitely a reflection that
 21 I had afterwards, and one of the reasons that led
 22 Melanie and I to discuss whether it would be appropriate
 23 to visit and try and glean more information,
 24 particularly on the management of the local council
 25 arrangements.

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1 I mean, as I say earlier, my primary concern was —
 2 from my area of the business was to make sure that if
 3 the council was leading the response phase, they did
 4 this in a good way, and so really my concern was that
 5 they would need the involvement of London Resilience to
 6 help them with those Gold arrangements.
 7 Q. Let's go back to the email note that we were looking at.
 8 That's {CLG00008140/2}, just to cover the conversation
 9 that you had with the LGA.
 10 Firstly I should ask: what was the need for you to
 11 speak with the LGA on 15 June?
 12 A. So I think I'd go back to my earlier comments, that
 13 I was thinking very much about the response phase, about
 14 whether RBKC had organised them in a way that they were
 15 able to lead the response, wanted to check the LGA
 16 knowledge of what was happening on the ground, and
 17 actually I was probably — I was the lead person with
 18 the relationship for the Local Government Association in
 19 the department, so it seemed appropriate for me to speak
 20 to them.
 21 Q. We can see there on the fourth bullet point down:
 22 "■ They have offered comms support to RBKC.
 23 "■ They said that wider comms should highlight how
 24 we are working closely together. Could we copy them
 25 into our press releases in advance."

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1 Do you know if RBKC accepted their offer of comms
 2 support?
 3 A. So the next day, it seemed to me that they were — yes,
 4 they were still trying to work out what comms support
 5 they needed. That was from a conversation with the
 6 leader.
 7 Q. I'd like to move on to a conversation at 1.30 on
 8 15 June, then, that you had with Ms Dawes. It was
 9 a conversation following your telephone call with
 10 Mr Holgate and Mark Lloyd; is that right?
 11 A. Yes. Yes, so — well, the LGA, yes.
 12 Q. What decision did you resolve to make in that
 13 conversation with Ms Dawes? I think you have already
 14 answered this.
 15 A. So this was to visit, that I should accompany the
 16 Secretary of State on his visit the next day to the
 17 Westway Centre and then go and see the chief executive
 18 in person.
 19 Q. It may be obvious, but why did you decide to visit?
 20 A. Because there were a number — as you said, actually,
 21 there were a number of discrepancies or areas that
 22 I felt we needed to probe further, and Melanie agreed
 23 with that, so felt it would be useful, given my previous
 24 experience and my role in DCLG for me to do that.
 25 Q. Would you normally visit the scene of an emergency?

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1 A. No, not normally, no, and, as I say, I wasn't part —
 2 the response was being organised differently in central
 3 government and visits were being co-ordinated in that
 4 way. So I wouldn't have just chosen to have gone
 5 without kind of the appropriate sign-off, because,
 6 you know, visits from central government do need to be
 7 managed and can be — can not always help.
 8 Q. Did you consider, because of your previous professional
 9 experience as a chief executive, you had the ability to
 10 assess whether the response effort by RBKC was being
 11 well managed?
 12 A. Yes, yes, absolutely, but I wasn't — I think what
 13 I realised the next day — and maybe we'll discuss this
 14 later — I also felt that other people would see the
 15 things that I had seen. With hindsight, I've really
 16 reflected on the value of experience. But I definitely
 17 felt it could help.
 18 Q. Could we go to {CLG00030483}, please. 14.49, it should
 19 be the second email in the chain.
 20 (Pause)
 21 Thank you. We can see that now: 15 June, at 2.49 in
 22 the afternoon, "Actions from the 13:30 update meeting".
 23 Was this your meeting with Melanie Dawes, or was it
 24 an earlier meeting?
 25 A. I'm not — I don't think this was my meeting with

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1 Melanie Dawes.
 2 Q. Who was present in your meeting with Melanie Dawes? Was
 3 it just the two of you?
 4 A. I think it was just Melanie and I had met afterwards so
 5 that I could feed back on the conversation with
 6 Nicholas Holgate. I may have been at this meeting, but
 7 I think this was a — but I'm not sure if I was or not.
 8 I may have been.
 9 Q. Later that day, on 15 June, at 3.30, there was
 10 a ministerial meeting. You didn't attend that meeting,
 11 did you?
 12 A. No, no.
 13 Q. But Katherine Richardson, the deputy director, did; is
 14 that right?
 15 A. That's right.
 16 Q. As did Helen MacNamara, director general for housing and
 17 planning, who you have already referred to; is that
 18 right?
 19 A. Yes, yes.
 20 Q. I'd like to take you to your first witness statement,
 21 please, at page 11 {CLG00030414/11}, paragraph 49. You
 22 say here:
 23 "A further Ministerial meeting took place at
 24 5.30 ..."
 25 Could I just clarify, is this a different

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1 ministerial meeting to the one that took place at 3.30
 2 chaired by Nicholas Hurd?
 3 A. Yes, because I didn't attend those meetings. This would
 4 have been an internal departmental ministerial meeting.
 5 I think I was at a different meeting at the time,
 6 I can't — but yes, it says, "I was not able to attend
 7 this meeting".
 8 Q. But it goes on to say:
 9 "During the course of the meeting,
 10 Katherine Richardson sent me a text message to inform me
 11 that 'No.10 are concerned about [Nicholas Holgate's]
 12 grip of the situation. We might want to get him to ask
 13 us for people to help.'"
 14 We can see that text message if we go to
 15 {CLG00030628}.
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. Just to navigate this, the messages in grey, I believe,
 18 are Katherine Richardson, and yours are in green; is
 19 that right?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. If we start at the top, it says:
 22 "Thanks Jo — sure. Let's chat after the
 23 [Secretary of State meeting]."
 24 Is this the 5.30 meeting?
 25 A. I'm not sure, because it's quite early in the morning,

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1 so there may have been another Secretary of State
 2 meeting. There were regular Secretary of State meetings
 3 during the day.
 4 Q. I don't think that the time that you can see there at
 5 the top is necessarily the time that these messages were
 6 sent.
 7 A. Okay. So I'm not sure, then, in that case.
 8 Q. In green you say this:
 9 "I've left a message for NH."
 10 Is that Nicholas Holgate?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. "He hasn't come back yet. Anything particular you need
 13 me to cover? I've put him in touch with our housing
 14 team about the rehousing. Jo."
 15 Ms Richards responds:
 16 "No10 are concerned about his grip of the situation.
 17 We might want to get him to ask us for people to help.
 18 Hopefully won't be long in this [meeting] then I'll
 19 call."
 20 Did you then have a telephone conversation with
 21 Ms Richardson?
 22 A. I believe I did, yes.
 23 Q. What did you discuss in that conversation?
 24 A. So this is where it was becoming clear that there were
 25 concerns about Nicholas Holgate personally, and this is

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1 where it was becoming clearer that he was the sole Gold
 2 for local authority, so wasn't drawing in other Golds
 3 for — from other places, and that there were concerns
 4 that were wider than housing. As you can see in my
 5 message above, I had a number of things to cover with
 6 Nicholas Holgate, but wanted to be sure that I was
 7 covering everything that government needed me to cover.
 8 Q. You say that it then became clear at this stage that he
 9 was the sole Local Authority Gold at that stage; what
 10 would you say about your situational awareness and the
 11 department's situational awareness at the time?
 12 A. So I'm not — I mean, it's hard for me to comment on the
 13 department's situational awareness because, as I've
 14 said, I wasn't involved in the ministerial meetings
 15 where all of this information comes together, so
 16 I wouldn't want to make assumptions. I think
 17 information was coming through that was conflicting with
 18 other information that we had been given, such as,
 19 you know, the support from London Resilience, and it was
 20 becoming a bit more obvious that, actually, London
 21 Resilience were less involved.
 22 Q. We're now on day three of the incident. Some
 23 considerable days had passed. Would you not have
 24 expected that you or RED would be aware of what the
 25 arrangements were at the time?

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1 A. Yes, and I think a reflection is that we — you know, we
2 shouldn't make assumptions, and we shouldn't — and
3 I think actually, you know, we weren't. I mean, so when
4 you're told something, it's really important to make
5 sure that you check that out, and I think this was the
6 reason for me trying to see Nicholas Holgate, so that
7 I could make sure. And, as I say, I was primarily
8 concerned with the recovery phase. At the moment, it
9 was — the council was a little bit protected in terms
10 of the arrangements because the response stage was being
11 led by the emergency services, so, you know, that was
12 the — kind of the local arrangements that were in
13 place, where different actions were agreed and pulled
14 together. If you think, it would be quite — that's
15 quite a big task. The council then taking that on
16 themselves, that's a — for the response phase, where,
17 you know, there are many displaced people and, you know,
18 vulnerable people and bereaved people, you need to make
19 sure that those arrangements are solid so that they can
20 respond appropriately to the recovery phase following
21 the fire. So that's what I was primarily concerned
22 with. And, you know, one of the reassurances we would
23 have is if London Resilience were very involved in that
24 recovery phase, given the fact that they can call on
25 mutual aid very easily and their experience of managing

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1 other situations, of which there have been several in
2 London.
3 Q. You mentioned the word "reflection"; do you have any
4 reflection about this, your own situational awareness at
5 the time?
6 A. Actually, I mean, that's quite difficult, really,
7 because, you know, in emergencies, a lot is happening,
8 and it's really important that people have clear roles
9 and responsibilities, and I believe my clear role and
10 responsibility was to make sure that the council was
11 able to run the recovery phase. The government had put
12 in place a structure to manage the incident. There were
13 very competent people involved in that structure.
14 I think it's — you know, as we've seen, I think, with
15 the management of this incident in Kensington and
16 Chelsea, it's really important that you don't think you
17 can do all of this on your own. So, therefore, not
18 everybody can be aware of everything. It's just really
19 important it comes together in a place, and that place
20 was the ministerial group, and that's why if there are
21 actions from the ministerial group that I could
22 undertake while focusing on the council and whether it
23 was ready to lead the recovery, I felt that I should be
24 able to do that.
25 Do I feel it was necessary for me to know everything

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1 about the housing situation? I think that would have
2 just weakened my focus. So it was really important for
3 me to be doing the things that would help to manage this
4 situation going forward, particularly once it was
5 a local authority response.
6 Q. You say in your statement and you've said in your
7 evidence that this was really the first time that you
8 became aware of issues with Mr Holgate personally. Are
9 you saying that because Mr Holgate was not personally
10 named with regards to any concerns at the local
11 authority, you didn't consider that there might have
12 been an issue with his leadership of the response?
13 A. No, so it's different — so there's — the council is
14 a big entity and, actually, you know, there is the
15 official leadership reporting in to council leadership,
16 there are a number of people involved, there is the
17 housing department that was obviously leading the
18 housing effort, and as the chief executive, you know,
19 you're running 900 different services, potentially, for
20 the people of your area. You know, you have to put the
21 structure in place to make sure the response is being
22 led effectively. And so this was the first time that
23 I was receiving messages about the way Nicholas Holgate
24 had put the structure in place to manage the situation
25 and whether he was personally gripping it as he should

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1 be as a chief executive, particularly if he was the sole
2 Gold person in this response for the council.
3 Q. What about your conversation earlier that day with
4 Mr Holgate directly? There were some unusual aspects.
5 You found him surprising in certain aspects.
6 A. Yes, which is why I thought it was important to,
7 you know, go and see him and make — and test this in
8 a bit more detail. It's very difficult, when someone's
9 in the middle of an emergency situation, dealing with
10 a lot of things, who doesn't have a lot of time to speak
11 to you, to get to the bottom of everything, so it felt
12 really important to have a follow-up conversation and to
13 do this face-to-face.
14 Q. Just looking at this message that we have in front of
15 us, Ms Richardson says:
16 "We might want to get him to ask us for people to
17 help."
18 What did you understand that to mean?
19 A. Well, I mean, councils are directly elected independent
20 bodies and have responsibilities for running services in
21 their area. Actually, there aren't really quick
22 mechanisms for local government to intervene and take
23 over local councils. This can take quite a while to do
24 this. And we have done it, but it doesn't happen
25 overnight. I mean, this is obviously a fast-moving

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1 situation. I mean, the best thing for the council to do
 2 is to open themselves up and show where they need help,
 3 and then we can all work together as a team to make sure
 4 that that's provided. And in fact that — from my
 5 experience of local councils, that's normally how the
 6 situation works. So there's — I've never really seen
 7 a reluctance to ask for help from central government if
 8 it's needed. I mean, that's not saying there isn't.
 9 Just in my experience, if help is needed from central
 10 government, it usually is. And we've seen this in,
 11 for example, several incidents of flooding across the UK
 12 or in, you know, really difficult incidents that
 13 involved terror.

14 Q. Could I take you to {CLG00003203/2}, please. It's the
 15 second email on the page. 15 June, 15.44. It's from
 16 a member of DCLG to your office:

17 "Hi Jo — we've had a re—think. [Please] could you
 18 contact the [chief exec] of K&C [Kensington and Chelsea]
 19 with support from Fiona and Kerry. As we talked about —
 20 we should do this fairly swiftly."

21 Can you give us the context to this?

22 A. I'm trying to remember. So this was in the afternoon of
 23 the 15th. I was going on the 16th, I think. I'd been
 24 asked to raise this with Nicholas Holgate. They were
 25 asking me to do this more quickly. I think I had

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1 difficulty getting hold of him. I may have had a text
 2 exchange with him where I was encouraging this. In the
 3 end, I actually raised it with the leader and agreed
 4 support through that route the next day.

5 Q. I'd like to take you to the following document at
 6 {CLG00030628}, and we can see here, let's follow the —
 7 forgive me.

8 (Pause)

9 Sorry, could we go to {CLG00030414/11}. That should
 10 be your first witness statement, paragraph 48 on
 11 page 11. You say here:

12 "At 5.02pm, I again telephoned Nicholas Holgate and
 13 left a message with him."

14 Can you help us with whether that was a voicemail
 15 message or a message with his office?

16 A. No, I left a voicemail, and I also asked my office to
 17 get in touch with his office to find a time for us to
 18 meet the next day, and I confirmed with him that I would
 19 be visiting the next day. Yes, I'm not — it was
 20 difficult, from my memory, to confirm a meeting.

21 Q. You also say there in the next two lines down that:

22 "... Fiona Darby (Deputy Director for homelessness
 23 within MHCLG) had agreed to work with the RBKC housing
 24 team."

25 Do you know if she was then deployed that day?

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1 A. So I saw her at RBKC the next day with the director of
 2 housing, and I think it was one of her team that we had
 3 wanted to embed or that the housing team had wanted to
 4 embed in with the RBKC housing team to make sure there
 5 was a link back to central government. This was being
 6 agreed outside of my area, but because I was visiting
 7 and in contact with the chief executive, I was also
 8 asked to raise this. But I believe — and actually I'm
 9 sure — that the offer of support had been raised
 10 separately with RBKC.

11 Q. You also say in this paragraph, further down, that
 12 Lizzie Clifford from the housing and planning group in
 13 MHCLG was also subsequently embedded at RBKC housing
 14 team and provided her expertise in support of the
 15 rehousing effort; is that right?

16 A. Yeah, and she — yes, and she was very helpful.
 17 I mean — so is it appropriate at this time for me to
 18 talk about how — when I raised the points about having
 19 housing support and how it came to — how we came to
 20 have Lizzie embedded in the team? Would that be
 21 helpful?

22 So when I visited on the 16th —

23 Q. If you're going to talk about the visit, could we just
 24 come to that?

25 A. Yeah, sure. But it was through the visit on the 16th

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1 and the meeting with Alok Sharma that we managed to
 2 embed Lizzie, and we might want to come back to that.
 3 I think it's important.

4 Q. Right. We will come back to that, but if we could just
 5 move to the correspondence on the evening of 15 June,
 6 then.

7 We can see here an email that you received at
 8 {CLG00003120}, at 7.21, and I'd like to just draw your
 9 attention to the final paragraph of that message:

10 "Alex Powell popped up to try and find you/Helen
 11 (but neither of you were about, Helen with [Secretary of
 12 State]. Apparently No.10 had asked whether we should
 13 intervene in K&C due to poor management of housing (this
 14 had come to him via RED). We said 'intervene' sounded
 15 wrong (there was already strong government response
 16 (e.g. public inquiry, Bellwin scheme, and support to
 17 find rehousing); and we were working closely with the
 18 local authority. Ellie also pointed out that there are
 19 a number of similar tower blocks in various parts of the
 20 country). But it sounds like there might be an appetite
 21 for us at least working very closely with the local
 22 authority and their housing department."

23 Just pausing there, what did you understand
 24 "intervene in K&C" to mean?

25 A. Well, at that point I think I was — it was difficult to

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1 tell what we meant. "Intervene" could have meant
 2 a number of different things. So in the past we have
 3 intervened in councils in quite a light-touch way, by
 4 putting people in to the council to work with the
 5 leadership of the team — a leadership team in
 6 the council. In other areas we have — central
 7 government has taken over the running of the council,
 8 putting in commissioners to run the council directly.
 9 These things take a number of weeks to put in place,
 10 actually, sometimes longer. It's a big decision to take
 11 away the responsibilities of a local government
 12 organisation who are directly elected.
 13 There were examples of us doing more, in particular,
 14 in one area of the council. So in this instance, Alex
 15 is raising the management of housing. So it absolutely
 16 did seem, as it says at the end of this email, that we
 17 should be more closely involved with the housing
 18 department and, you know, as I'd picked up earlier in
 19 the email from I believe it was Sally, that there seemed
 20 to be a keenness to — for them to have more support
 21 from Fiona Darby and her team and, in fact, have someone
 22 embedded within the housing department.
 23 So that's what I understood that to mean, as someone
 24 looking at this from just an email — from just the
 25 email.

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1 Q. Could commissioners have been sent in?
 2 A. So, yes, this is something Melanie and I discussed, but
 3 actually it would have been hard to do that very
 4 quickly. So — because you need to undertake a process,
 5 and actually RBKC are managing a number of services to
 6 the whole of the borough, so it's — so the question is,
 7 you know: how are they managing it and what's the best
 8 way to manage this situation?
 9 You know, as it happened, RBKC themselves recognised
 10 that they needed — or decided to change their
 11 leadership. I think in these situations it's really
 12 important to have the right leadership of the council.
 13 But the council actually has access to a lot of support
 14 and resources, as a directly elected public body, that
 15 central government might not be able to access in the
 16 same way.
 17 So wherever possible, it's better that the local
 18 directly elected council is competent and able to manage
 19 its services with residents. That's the way government
 20 is structured in this country. But ...
 21 So my concern really at the time, as I've said, was
 22 with the response phase and making sure that there
 23 was — that the leadership of the response was
 24 effective, because it seemed to me that that was going
 25 to be the critical thing going forward, making sure

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1 there was a strong local response for the people of
 2 Kensington and Chelsea, and people — particularly
 3 people in the area of Grenfell Tower and surrounding
 4 houses.
 5 Q. I'd just like to pick up one point on this email.
 6 It says here that the information had been fed
 7 through RED. Had this information been fed through RED
 8 to you?
 9 A. So I think this is probably referring to the same
 10 information that Katherine Richardson, who was head of
 11 RED, was feeding to me about the support that RBKC
 12 needed and, you know, as we've seen from the text, there
 13 was keenness to offer housing support, but also
 14 questions about the chief executive of the local
 15 authority as well.
 16 Q. Could we go to much later in the evening on the 15th,
 17 then, to 10.25, {CLG00008222}. It's the second email on
 18 the page. It's an email from Helen MacNamara to your
 19 office. The bottom of the first paragraph, she says:
 20 "77 households are in hotels and there are 30 people
 21 who slept in the respite centre. This is going to
 22 require funding. But the clear view from the Ministers
 23 meeting this afternoon was that we have to step up and
 24 funding should not constrain us. I think this sits best
 25 as part of the recovery and response work rather than

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1 the other housing issues so if you are ok to do so it
 2 would be great if you can help to cover this aspect."
 3 What did you understand Ms MacNamara was asking you
 4 to be involved in at this point?
 5 A. So I understood it was help with the funding, and as
 6 I — as the local government finance team sat under my
 7 remit. So it was particularly the funding issues.
 8 There was then the next paragraph, which talks about the
 9 housing issues, which were under Helen's remit, where
 10 Fiona was going to go with Alok Sharma to meet the
 11 housing director. She wasn't able to attend, so she
 12 asked me to go in her place. That was my understanding.
 13 Q. I'd like to move on to 16 June, then, and communications
 14 that morning.
 15 Firstly, a communication received by you at 7.41.
 16 That's at {CLG00003272}. If we can scroll down to the
 17 email at 7.41. It's an email from Lorna Gratton at
 18 Number 10 to the office of the Secretary of State,
 19 forgive me, not to you, but to the office of the
 20 Secretary of State, subject, "CLG support to RBKC":
 21 "Hello,
 22 "I spoke to Helen Mac yesterday after the cross
 23 government meeting. There are still concerns here about
 24 how well organised the response effort is for those in
 25 receipt of it on the ground. Would it be helpful for

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1 them to have more support from CLG (e.g a small team of
2 people seconded similar to the victim support unit)?
3 Could you let me know what you think."

4 Then if we go up in the chain, we can see that that
5 email then filtered to Ms Dawes' office and to yours.

6 Moving on, then, to a discussion that you had with
7 Ms Richardson, that's at {CLG00008227}. It should be
8 the second email on the page at 8.02. We can see here
9 an email from Katherine Richardson, 8.02 on 16 June, to
10 Robert Mason of the resilience and emergencies division
11 and to your office. The subject is, "CLG support to
12 RBKC".

13 It says:

14 "Thanks Helen — yes, Jo and I discussed. Ideally we
15 can encourage Nick H to ask us for the specific help
16 we're offering. Copying Alex P who should be kept
17 sighted on this."

18 Just pausing there, what did you understand
19 encouraging Nick Holgate "to ask us for the specific
20 help we're offering" to mean?

21 A. So in conversations in between those emails, I was
22 asked — I was told that specific help had been made
23 from Helen and Fiona Darby's team to RBKC to —

24 Q. What was that specific —

25 A. On housing, on housing, and that wasn't being accepted.

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1 So I was asked to follow that up when I visited the next
2 day.

3 Q. At 8.14, if we —

4 A. I think importantly on that email, actually, if we just
5 paused on it, there were — Nick Hurd was also then
6 starting to raise concerns. He may have been raising
7 them earlier, but in this email it's very clear he's
8 raising concerns about the response on the ground and
9 getting information to people affected. So this is part
10 of the wider concerns that I then became aware of and
11 were actually really helpful to have in advance of
12 visiting RBKC.

13 Q. We've seen those earlier, those emails from Mr Hurd's
14 office, where concerns were being raised by him or
15 specific issues were being raised by him, and
16 the Inquiry has heard evidence that those emails started
17 on the morning of 15 June.

18 But we can see here that the second paragraph you're
19 referring to says:

20 "I've also just taken a call from the housing
21 minister's office. Nick Hurd is continuing to raise
22 concerns about how the response on the ground is working
23 eg getting information to people affected. Some of this
24 is for the police rather than K+C but we should consider
25 a stronger offer of support."

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1 Then go up to the next email at 8.23 at the top of
2 the page:

3 "I mentioned to Melanie yesterday."

4 This is Helen MacNamara saying:

5 "We need to really get on this. Actual PM is
6 concerned and this will run away from us if we haven't
7 done something concrete today.

8 "Don't think politely waiting for Nick H to ask is
9 right tactic — we are basically being told to grip."

10 Was that the attitude, to wait for Nick Holgate to
11 ask for help before stepping in?

12 A. No, I'm — no, absolutely not. I mean, you know, I was
13 asked to ask him to ask for specific help, and that's
14 the way that it was being phrased, but I don't think
15 anyone was politely waiting for him. I know Helen's
16 team were certainly in touch with RBKC, and I'd had the
17 conversation with him the day before. So, yes. I mean,
18 I obviously wasn't copied in to this email, although
19 I do believe I may have seen it.

20 MS MALHOTRA: If we could go to {CLG00008230}, please —

21 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Well, before we do, could I just ask
22 this: I mean, what options did you have?

23 A. What options did we have?

24 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes.

25 A. So, I mean, they would have been limited. I mean, RBKC

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1 was a directly elected public body, we — the powers of
2 central government to intervene are, as I say, limited.
3 They — I have never seen them enacted in days, so the
4 best thing to do is to make sure that the council has
5 the right leadership in place. I mean, I think,
6 you know, we saw within a very short time, actually,
7 that there was a different council leadership in place.
8 If you have the right leadership in a council and the
9 right resources, then, you know, they can often manage
10 situations more effectively than central government.
11 Central government isn't a local government service
12 provider.

13 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: No, I understand that, but looking
14 at what Helen MacNamara is suggesting, she is suggesting
15 that you shouldn't wait for Mr Holgate to ask for
16 assistance, and I was just wondering what powers you had
17 to do anything —

18 A. Yeah, so —

19 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: I mean, putting in commissioners is
20 pretty much the last option, isn't it, and would take
21 a little time?

22 A. Yes, absolutely. I mean, and that — but that is the —
23 I mean, that's the way to take over a council.

24 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: And does that involve taking over
25 all the functions of the council? It does, doesn't it?

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1 A. Usually, generally, it does involve taking over all the
 2 functions of the council. I believe you may have been
 3 able to have a different arrangement, but that would
 4 have needed to have been worked through, because
 5 obviously, you know, housing for one part of the
 6 borough, obviously — and social care, obviously it's
 7 hard to separate one bit from the council, because
 8 they're providing support to a large number of people.
 9 But, yeah, I'm not sure what Helen was referring to
 10 there, really, because actually, as I said, there was
 11 a command structure. I think we saw from the 16th that,
 12 actually, if central government can help to persuade
 13 councils to act in the right way, we have a lot of soft
 14 power.
 15 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes, you can bring some persuasion
 16 to bear, but that was probably about it, wasn't it?
 17 A. Absolutely, yeah.
 18 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, thank you.
 19 MS MALHOTRA: If I can just take you to {CLG00008230},
 20 please. It's an email at 8.40. It's a document that we
 21 have seen before. It's the first email on the page.
 22 We've been to it before. I just want to ask you about
 23 the final sentence here. It says:
 24 " ... I am not sure if we could ask the Home Office
 25 if we should extend the victim support unit to help

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1 the Council."
 2 Can you just explain what it was that is being asked
 3 here from your office?
 4 A. So we had set up victim support units in other
 5 incidents, and so I think I was asking Katherine —
 6 I mean, I haven't phrased that particularly well, and
 7 apologies for that, but I am saying, "Katherine, could
 8 we ask the Home Office if we could extend the victim
 9 support unit, is that appropriate?", because it seemed
 10 to me that that might be a positive thing to do.
 11 I believe others raised that as well. But the victim
 12 support unit in other incidents had proved to be very
 13 useful.
 14 Q. Did you have any involvement in the setting up of a unit
 15 of this kind in response to the Grenfell Tower fire?
 16 A. So Jillian Kay led on the setting up of that unit.
 17 Yeah.
 18 MS MALHOTRA: Thank you.
 19 Mr Chairman, I think that's a convenient moment.
 20 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Is that a good point? Yes.
 21 I think it's time we stopped now and had a break for
 22 some lunch, so we'll stop there. We'll resume, please,
 23 at 2 o'clock. As I said to you earlier, please don't
 24 talk to anyone about your evidence over the break.
 25 THE WITNESS: No, I won't do. Thank you.

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1 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right? Thank you very much.
 2 Would you go with the usher, then, please.
 3 (Pause)
 4 Thank you very much, 2 o'clock, then, please.
 5 (1.01 pm)
 6 (A short break)
 7 (2.00 pm)
 8 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Right, Dr Farrar, all ready to go
 9 on, I hope?
 10 THE WITNESS: Thank you, yes.
 11 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much.
 12 Yes, Ms Malhotra.
 13 MS MALHOTRA: Dr Farrar, we were talking about 16 June.
 14 I would like to move on to when you first attended RBKC
 15 on 16 June.
 16 Was it the position that you attended with the
 17 Secretary of State, the housing minister, Alok Sharma,
 18 and Fiona Darby, and you arrived at 9.00 am?
 19 A. So I attended with the Secretary of State to start with.
 20 Alok Sharma and Fiona Darby went, I believe, directly to
 21 the council to have a meeting with the housing director.
 22 Q. You state that you were met by Nicholas Paget—Brown in
 23 your statement and two councillors; is that right?
 24 A. Yes. Yes, at the Westway Centre.
 25 Q. Is that the first place that you went?

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1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. You say in your statement {CLG00030414/14} — we don't
 3 need to go to it unless you'd like me to take you to
 4 it — that you were surprised to find that they were
 5 unsupported by any senior officers of RBKC; is that
 6 correct?
 7 A. Yes, I was surprised.
 8 Q. Why were you surprised?
 9 A. Well, in my experience, and as a former chief executive
 10 of — in local government, I would have expected the
 11 leader to be supported by at least a senior official, if
 12 not the chief executive. I personally would have seen
 13 a visit by the Secretary of State and a director general
 14 from government as significant. I would want to make
 15 sure that I was able to answer any questions that they
 16 may have, and there are different roles for politicians
 17 and officers, so I would have felt it important to have
 18 both represented.
 19 Q. The day before, when arrangements were being made for
 20 your attendance, did you request senior officers of RBKC
 21 to attend?
 22 A. No, I didn't. I assumed they would be there.
 23 Q. Did you request for Mr Holgate to attend?
 24 A. I requested a meeting with Mr Holgate.
 25 Q. What about any other RBKC officers at the

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1 Westway Centre, did you observe any there?
 2 A. I didn't. I didn't observe any. There were a number of
 3 people there, but RBKC officers weren't visible as RBKC
 4 officers if they were there.
 5 Q. Would you have expected them to be there?
 6 A. Yes, and I would have expected them to be visible. So
 7 when running rest centres myself previously, my staff
 8 would have clearly been marked as council staff and
 9 there to support.
 10 Q. How would they be marked as council support?
 11 A. So they would have either had a lanyard or a jacket with
 12 some kind of indication that they were council staff,
 13 but it would have been clear that they worked for
 14 the council.
 15 Q. Whilst you were there, you say that you spoke to
 16 the councillors. Were you reassured by your
 17 conversation with them?
 18 A. No, I was not reassured at all, actually, by my
 19 conversation with the councillors.
 20 Q. What did they ask you?
 21 A. So they asked me questions that I felt should have
 22 been — I felt if they had had the support of senior
 23 officers, these were quite straightforward questions
 24 that should have been answered. So not particularly
 25 things that the councillors themselves would have known,

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1 but they were asking me questions about housing and
 2 availability of housing in the area, about schools and
 3 about education, and I felt that these were services
 4 that the council themselves would provide and officers
 5 could give useful answers to these questions. So that
 6 worried me a bit.
 7 And I — so, for example, I found myself in
 8 a conversation with the leader, who asked me, you know,
 9 how we communicate with schools, and, you know,
 10 particularly if schools were academies, but, you know,
 11 I said: well, actually, that would normally naturally
 12 happen through the education department in the council,
 13 who would have contact details, who would contact
 14 schools and that would be the route.
 15 They were also asking me about communication and
 16 what kind of support that they needed and, you know,
 17 in — and were thinking of bringing in PR support, but
 18 my feeling was actually, you know, no, they needed
 19 proper communications support to help communicate with
 20 residents. I felt that officers could have given that
 21 kind of — that reassurance and information about where
 22 and how to receive support.
 23 So I felt that the councillors there at the time
 24 were struggling to gain relevant information, but really
 25 were — seemed very genuine in terms of, you know, their

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1 real wish to help residents.
 2 Q. So you've mentioned there the visibility of officers,
 3 the questions by the councillors.
 4 I would like to ask you about what you observed at
 5 the Westway, please.
 6 A. So I observed a number of things: so, first of all, the
 7 absence of senior officers, or any officers; the
 8 questions that I was asked by councillors, which I felt
 9 the council would have been able to answer; I noticed
 10 the absence of proper bedding, which seemed significant
 11 to me, just in terms of the way the rest centre was set
 12 up; and I noticed that, actually, there were people
 13 there who seemed to still be staying in the
 14 Westway Centre and in fact were not in hotels.
 15 Q. So you observed people sleeping at the Westway?
 16 A. Well, I think — they seemed to me to have been sleeping
 17 at the Westway. Obviously they weren't asleep at the
 18 time.
 19 Q. Can I take you to {CLG00030477/2}, please. It's the
 20 second bullet point. We can see here at the top,
 21 15 June, 8.45, it's an email that you've been shown
 22 earlier today. At the third bullet point it says:
 23 "There have also been a couple of concerns raised
 24 with him about the quality of the sleeping materials
 25 that were available for people last night and asked if

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1 there was anything [Her Majesty's Government] could do
 2 to help the Council upgrade?"
 3 Did you consider it acceptable that these issues
 4 that had been raised on the morning of the 15th had
 5 still not been resolved by the time of your visit?
 6 A. So I think as we discussed earlier, I hadn't — at the
 7 time of my visit, I wasn't aware that those issues had
 8 been raised earlier, so at the time of my visit, no.
 9 I think what I — so from my own experience of setting
 10 up rest centres, actually it's done in partnership with
 11 the Red Cross or with other providers. In my own
 12 experience, actually, there is — bedding is supplied,
 13 so there is actual bedding for people to sleep on.
 14 I mean, it's, you know, some kind of mattress or
 15 something, which didn't seem to be there. The bedding
 16 provided, in the experience I've had before, is the
 17 same. So it's provided — this seemed to be — the
 18 bedding there was all very different, so it looked to me
 19 as if it had come from donations. I mean, I may not be
 20 right about that, but actually it didn't seem to be the
 21 kind of regimented rest centre that I was — that
 22 I would have been used to setting up. In fact, I only
 23 a few years before had set up rest centres in Bath in
 24 response to an incident.
 25 Q. Could I just ask you about that: you mentioned the

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1 British Red Cross and having an agreement in place for
 2 bedding; in your experience, how would that be
 3 facilitated ?
 4 A. So in my experience — and it may not be the British
 5 Red Cross, but in my experience as a chief executive, my
 6 emergency planning department had arrangements with
 7 another provider, or in fact sometimes had items in
 8 stock, so that when we had to set up a rest centre, it
 9 would happen very quickly, and it would — there would
 10 be mattresses and there would be bedding and it would
 11 all look very similar, and there would be, therefore,
 12 places for people to sleep.
 13 Q. You've already said that the bedding was of a different
 14 nature. Was it your assumption that then this had been
 15 provided by donations, as opposed to a pre-arranged
 16 agreement between RBKC and another supplier?
 17 A. It seemed like that to me, but, I mean, I have no
 18 evidence of that, but it seemed like that to me, and in
 19 fact there was a table of donations in the
 20 Westway Centre which some — where there was clothing
 21 and I believe some bedding.
 22 Q. Did you raise this with anybody whilst you were there?
 23 A. No, I didn't, actually, because I was raising a number
 24 of other issues, so this was just one of my
 25 observations, which led to my assumption that, actually,

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1 there needed to be a proper or a more organised Gold
 2 response from the council.
 3 Q. You say that there were other issues that you were
 4 raising; what other issues?
 5 A. So the ones that I have mentioned primarily.
 6 Q. Can you help us with how many people there were at the
 7 Westway Centre?
 8 A. So there were a number — no, there were a number of
 9 people there. They mostly to me seemed to be from the
 10 voluntary sector. In fact, people we were introduced to
 11 or who introduced themselves to us were from the
 12 voluntary sector. So some were offering counselling
 13 support, for example. So there were a number of people
 14 there and a number of tables with people at them. It
 15 was the lack of sort of a council contact point that
 16 concerned me.
 17 Q. Did you meet with any volunteers at the Westway Centre?
 18 A. Not properly, but they were introduced to the
 19 Secretary of State, I believe, and briefly met one or
 20 two volunteers, but didn't have any lengthy conversation
 21 with them.
 22 Q. I'd like to move on to a meeting at 9.40, then. This is
 23 still on 16 June.
 24 There was a meeting between the Secretary of State
 25 and Nicholas Paget-Brown, the leader, at the

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1 Westway Centre at approximately 9.40, you say in your
 2 statement.
 3 What was discussed at that meeting?
 4 A. So a number of things were discussed. They — people
 5 who remained at the Westway Centre were discussed.
 6 I mean, I specifically remember a conversation about —
 7 instigated by the leader, actually, about education, the
 8 one I mentioned earlier about how to ensure that schools
 9 were engaged and informed, which seemed strange to raise
 10 at a meeting with the Secretary of State. I also
 11 offered at that meeting the leader the housing support
 12 that had been offered from the department, and I have to
 13 say the leader seemed delighted to take up that offer of
 14 support. He also discussed communications support. As
 15 I say, I think he was looking for the wrong type of
 16 communications support, so I was able to talk to him
 17 about that, and so was the Secretary of State, and
 18 I believe, actually, we re-offered — we said that the
 19 LGA had offered communications support; again, he seemed
 20 really grateful to accept that.
 21 So I was slightly worried that the offers of support
 22 hadn't been given to the leader. I may be wrong, but he
 23 didn't seem to know about all of the offers of support
 24 and, as I say, was really grateful to receive the offer
 25 of housing support.

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1 Q. Can I just pause you there for one moment.
 2 You said "wrong type of communication", he was
 3 asking for the wrong type; what did you mean by that?
 4 A. So he was wondering if he needed some support to help
 5 with the media, and there were a lot of media there, and
 6 felt inexperienced to deal with that. I seem to
 7 remember that's the gist of the conversation, and
 8 obviously that is something that, as a leader, you would
 9 think about, because they would want to — media
 10 obviously want to speak to you. But he was asking,
 11 you know, what type of communications support could he
 12 have, and actually the LGA were offering a wide range of
 13 communications support, and including, you know, support
 14 for residents.
 15 I felt, having been through some incidents myself —
 16 so, for example, the incident I mentioned in Bridgend,
 17 where there was an international media presence and
 18 interest in that — actually, we drew in some support
 19 from central government, which was really helpful,
 20 because it meant that we could separate off the
 21 communications support from the actual response and have
 22 different teams who could answer media questions, but,
 23 more importantly, have a team who could support
 24 residents.
 25 So that kind of knowledge and support and people who

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1 are used to dealing with communications in emergency
 2 situations, I felt that would be useful for him. As
 3 a leader, if you haven't been through this type of
 4 situation before, you wouldn't necessarily know that
 5 that was available. But — so felt that we could put
 6 him in touch with the Local Government Association, who
 7 were offering support in that area.
 8 Q. Your answers have probably dealt with my next question,
 9 but was this visit and was this conversation with the
 10 leader reassuring?
 11 A. No. So it was pivotal, actually, in terms of my worry
 12 about the council and whether they really were managing
 13 the situation as they should, and I think a particular
 14 worry were residents who were still at the
 15 Westway Centre, and I think there were questions by the
 16 leader and councillors about, you know, the support
 17 central government might give in order to provide
 18 funding, and actually we had seen that, and the
 19 Secretary of State had said, and was very reassuring,
 20 that that support was available. The leader didn't seem
 21 to know about that support and asked directly, you know,
 22 how he could make sure that residents were receiving the
 23 housing that they needed, and I was asked to raise this
 24 at the meeting with the housing — the director of
 25 housing, who — you know, to find out what the plan was

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1 for residents who still had not been housed. So I said
 2 that I would do that when I went to the meeting with
 3 Alok Sharma.
 4 Q. I'd like to take you to a text message that you sent to
 5 Ms Richardson, {CLG00030627}. You mentioned there the
 6 leader accepting support from housing colleagues, and we
 7 can see here:
 8 "Council Leader has agreed help from housing
 9 colleagues in terms of people. Could you link in with
 10 housing to arrange who so that Alok can let them know at
 11 his meeting. Thanks."
 12 Is this what you're referring to there, the offer of
 13 support to the housing team at RBKC?
 14 A. Yes, and the leader, who was the leader of the council,
 15 accepted this. So I felt that that — as one of the
 16 most senior people in the council, I felt that,
 17 you know, this should be relayed to that meeting,
 18 because he obviously was very happy to have support.
 19 Q. We can see that that message was sent at 10.13.
 20 You then go on to send a message:
 21 "I think they need a specialist emergency manager to
 22 help with this as well as specialist comms support. Not
 23 sure they want this, but I think it is essential."
 24 Can you give us the background to that message that
 25 you sent?

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1 A. Yes. So, as you know, I'd been — I'd spoken to
 2 Nicholas Holgate about support —
 3 Q. Was that the conversation with Nicholas Holgate the day
 4 before?
 5 A. The day before, and having seen the Westway Centre and,
 6 you know, putting that together with the confidence of
 7 the chief executive, I felt that his confidence was
 8 probably misplaced, because to me it seemed that, having
 9 experienced and having managed these situations, could
 10 be really helpful, and that really came from the
 11 questions from councillors, because they were the type
 12 of questions that are actually common in emergency
 13 situations. So having a reassuring presence who had led
 14 these types of situations I felt would be really
 15 helpful, and I also felt that the specialist
 16 communications support, as I've said — I mean, I learnt
 17 an awful lot of lessons from managing that incident in
 18 Bridgend and the communications support needed and, as
 19 I say, it has to be really wide-ranging, and I'm
 20 absolutely sure that the council hadn't recognised that
 21 or wasn't aware of that.
 22 So really felt — so, for me, the two things they
 23 needed was someone who was experienced operating their
 24 Gold arrangements, and someone helping them with
 25 communication, you know, particularly to residents.

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1 Q. I'd like to go next to {CLG00030638}. These are text
 2 messages between you and Ms Dawes, and I believe your
 3 messages are in grey and hers are in blue; is that
 4 right?
 5 A. Yes. There's also a typo on one of mine. It should be
 6 "comms".
 7 Q. We will come to that.
 8 It says:
 9 "Great. Will report back. Personally worried that
 10 Council are out of their depth. Have said we will give
 11 some housing officers. Will also sort out [comms]
 12 support with LGA. Jo."
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Ms Dawes responds:
 15 "Feel free to make big judgment call if we need to
 16 make massive Whitehall offer or demand lga one. Part of
 17 what we need to do is keep leaping ahead of the
 18 immediate situation."
 19 Did you feel able to make a judgement call about
 20 what the response needed?
 21 A. Yes, I did, and — yes, yeah, I did, and I think if we
 22 talk about what happened later, I think I did make a big
 23 judgement call. I also had conversations —
 24 a conversation with Melanie after these text messages,
 25 so I felt that I had the support of the Permanent

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1 Secretary. The Secretary of State had also given me
 2 support. He had similar concerns, obviously, having
 3 visited the Westway Centre, so I felt I had the support
 4 to be able to make an offer or use some sort of soft
 5 power to help make sure that the situation was being
 6 managed.
 7 Q. Just the final message I'd like to take you to, please,
 8 {CLG00030647}. We can see here in blue:
 9 "Jus[t] spoke to no 10 — u free to [speak]?
 10 "Yes. Just back with S. Will call in a mo."
 11 And then there's a message at 1.25, which we can
 12 come to in due course.
 13 Was this sequence of events that we can see here,
 14 "Jus[t] [speaking] to no 10", is that Ms Dawes telling
 15 you that she had spoken to number 10?
 16 A. Yes, yes.
 17 Q. Was this exchange after you had attended the meeting
 18 with Laura Johnson and spoken with Mr Holgate and
 19 Mr Barradell?
 20 A. What time was the message?
 21 Q. Unfortunately we don't have the time. All we see that
 22 the later message, "All good here", is at 1.25.
 23 A. So, I mean, we had several conversations, so it's just
 24 hard to pin that down. So we had one after I left the
 25 Westway Centre on the way to the meeting with

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1 Alok Sharma, and we had, I believe, another one after
 2 I'd met with Nicholas Holgate, and we had a further
 3 conversation before the ministerial recovery group. So
 4 we had two or three conversations. I'm not entirely
 5 sure which this one was.
 6 I think because there's not too much of a gap, and
 7 it says "manager taking over", I presume this was
 8 earlier, when I was talking about they need
 9 an experienced person to take over.
 10 Q. I want to move on to 11 o'clock that same day.
 11 RBKC's housing director, Laura Johnson,
 12 Rock Feilding—Mellen, Alok Sharma, the Minister for
 13 Housing and Planning, and Fiona Darby, the deputy
 14 director for homelessness, had a meeting; is that right?
 15 A. That's right, and in fact I had suggested the day before
 16 that — because the meeting was going to be with
 17 Laura Johnson, as the director for housing, I had
 18 suggested to the department that the lead member for
 19 housing should also be there. I thought that was
 20 appropriate because of the different responsibilities of
 21 members and officers, and the leadership role of members
 22 as well as officers, and given that Alok Sharma was
 23 attending along with officials from government, I felt
 24 that would be appropriate.
 25 So, I mean, that was another thing that — something

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1 that stuck in my mind, really, was there seemed to be
 2 an awful lot of deference in Kensington and Chelsea from
 3 members to officers, so people were addressed by their
 4 surname, so Mr Holgate, Ms Johnson. For me, that seemed
 5 unusual. So one of the things that I was questioning
 6 was the amount of challenge that you have between
 7 members and officers. So in the councils that I had
 8 been chief executive of, actually I was used to and
 9 welcomed scrutiny and challenge from members. It
 10 ensures that, you know, you have the best results.
 11 Now, in an emergency situation, there is
 12 a responsibility, as the category 1 responders, for
 13 officers to take more of a role, so not everything would
 14 be done in the same way as in normal council business,
 15 but the way the council was run — and really I'm acting
 16 on very thin evidence, the fact that people called each
 17 other by their surname, but it just raised an issue for
 18 me in terms of: what was that relationship like in terms
 19 of their other business? That was something that
 20 I spotted on the Friday.
 21 Q. So this meeting had started and you attended after the
 22 meeting started; is that right?
 23 A. I attended towards the end of the meeting.
 24 Q. So you would say you weren't present for the whole of
 25 it?

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1 A. Not for the whole meeting. I was there for part of the
 2 meeting, so I heard part of the discussion, but not
 3 all —
 4 Q. Can you tell us what you heard?
 5 A. So we — so at this point, they had — they were
 6 finishing talking about how — the council's plans for
 7 rehousing. There was a conversation which I also
 8 relayed from the leader about MHCLG sending someone to
 9 be embedded within their council team. I have to say
 10 that wasn't entirely welcomed.
 11 Q. Who was it not welcomed by?
 12 A. By the director of housing.
 13 Q. Is that Laura Johnson?
 14 A. Yes. So, I mean, to me, Laura Johnson — it was quite
 15 clear that she was working really hard and had been
 16 working very long hours, and maybe this is something
 17 that I'll come back to, but had been working really hard
 18 to make sure people were housed, but I feel, as the
 19 director of housing, you can't do all of this on your
 20 own, so — but she said to me that she knew Lizzie from
 21 previously, that Lizzie was very nice but didn't —
 22 wasn't entirely sure they needed that support at the
 23 moment. But, nevertheless, I said the leader had agreed
 24 to it, so Lizzie would be coming, and that's great.
 25 Q. And we know that is indeed what happened.

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1 A. And that is indeed what happened.
 2 Q. I'd like to show you an email next at {CLG00030515}.
 3 It's an email sent at 2.34 that afternoon on Friday,
 4 16 June. The first part of it, please:
 5 "The meeting with housing was managed well, despite
 6 it being understandably fraught."
 7 Why was it understandably fraught?
 8 A. Well, I mean, I felt that the — Laura Johnson was ...
 9 well, seemed tired to me. You know, I'm surmising,
 10 but — so just from my impression was that she was tired
 11 and perhaps a bit defensive, but I felt that Alok and
 12 housing colleagues were very calm and very clear in
 13 their messages and kept reiterating the need for
 14 support. So I felt that rather than walking away from
 15 the meeting without that offer of support being
 16 accepted, I felt that they pushed for that and for
 17 answers to questions.
 18 Q. We can see that here, it says:
 19 "Alok and housing colleagues were very professional
 20 and it is great that we have been able to organise for
 21 someone from the housing team to work with the housing
 22 directorate at the council."
 23 I'd like to just take you to Alok Sharma's witness
 24 statement. That's {CLG10009731/9}, paragraph 34. He
 25 says this:

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1 "The meeting was the real turning point for me.
 2 Though I had concerns following the previous day's
 3 cross—Whitehall meeting, this was the first time
 4 I experienced for myself the way in which RBKC was
 5 handling the situation. My overall impression was that
 6 the two individuals I spoke with were simply failing to
 7 understand the magnitude of the Grenfell Tower incident
 8 and the required urgency in the response. From the
 9 manner of the conversation it was clear that the Housing
 10 Director felt irritated I and my colleagues were there.
 11 We were informed that the local rehousing commitment was
 12 a distraction."
 13 Pausing there, was that the commitment to rehouse
 14 people locally within three weeks?
 15 A. I presume so, but I wasn't involved in that decision or
 16 commitment, but I presume that was what was being talked
 17 about.
 18 Q. "It was also intimated that DCLG was a 'distraction' for
 19 them. The Housing Director stated that she did not mind
 20 having housing support from DCLG embedded with the
 21 council, but said she had not had time to respond to our
 22 offers of help."
 23 Would you agree with that explanation given by
 24 Alok Sharma?
 25 A. It — yes, it — that was a very similar impression that

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1 I gained from the meeting.
 2 Q. So after these two meetings that you had had, one with
 3 the leader, one with Laura Johnson, what was your
 4 impression of RBKC and its leadership?
 5 A. Well, I was concerned, so I was concerned that there
 6 wasn't alignment between the — there wasn't
 7 an alignment between the political and the official
 8 leadership. I was concerned that the housing director
 9 had been trying to manage this on her own, and actually
 10 it seemed to me that she was — she genuinely seemed
 11 concerned to me and wanting to do the right thing, but
 12 she appeared tired. She mentioned that she had been
 13 working for a number of days. I feel that if they had
 14 asked for support, particularly from London Resilience,
 15 that there would have been a rota which, I believe,
 16 would have allowed the housing director to just look at
 17 the situation maybe more strategically, or at least have
 18 support, so would have been able to have time to think
 19 about other offers of help and support, because there
 20 would have been support for her in terms of managing the
 21 immediate housing need. And, personally, I think it
 22 would be, in an incident of this magnitude, really
 23 difficult for one person to be leading the housing
 24 response, when so many people had lost their homes.
 25 Q. You have mentioned London Resilience and the London

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1 Resilience Partnership a number of times. Could you
 2 just clarify what exactly you're referring to when you
 3 say London Resilience would be stepping in?
 4 A. So I think you — in — is it —
 5 Q. London Local Authority Gold, is that what you're
 6 referring to?
 7 A. Yes. Is it referred to, LL —
 8 Q. LLAG.
 9 A. LLAG is what I'm referring to when I talk about London
 10 Resilience.
 11 Q. And just to be clear, that's the London Local Authority
 12 Gold?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. I'd like to go back, please, to the text message we were
 15 looking at before, {CLG00030627}. We can see there, at
 16 the second message, that you think a specialist
 17 emergency manager was required.
 18 "Melanie agrees — I'm working on this now."
 19 This is messages between you and
 20 Katherine Richardson, and then you say:
 21 "An experienced ex [chief exec] who has dealt with
 22 things like this or someone similar would just grip this
 23 and would be good. Jo."
 24 Was it the case that you, Ms Richardson and Ms Dawes
 25 agreed that a specialist emergency planner was

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1 necessary?
 2 A. Well, someone who had experience of managing emergency
 3 situations, it seemed to me, needed to be leading Local
 4 Authority Gold.
 5 I actually think that had Kensington and Chelsea
 6 invoked the London Resilience arrangements, London Gold
 7 arrangements, at the time, then actually that would have
 8 been — brought in a rota, so — I think it's probably
 9 similar for Nicholas Holgate as it was for the director
 10 of housing. It's very difficult for someone to manage
 11 this intensity of situation as the Gold without other
 12 experienced people helping. Had he drawn on that
 13 earlier, it might have been that the situation —
 14 you know, they would have managed the situation
 15 differently and would have had stronger arrangements
 16 moving forward. I think it had reached a point, though,
 17 in my mind, where, actually, they just really needed to
 18 draw on someone who was experienced and they just needed
 19 clarity of leadership.
 20 Q. Can we take it from this exchange that you were unaware
 21 that Mr Holgate had been in discussion with Mr Barradell
 22 the day before?
 23 A. Yes, I was unaware, and in fact there was no suggestion
 24 from my conversation with Nicholas Holgate that he was
 25 going to ask Mr Barradell to give additional help. In

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1 fact, he had said to me that they were already helping.
 2 So hence at this point I'm questioning whether that
 3 arrangement is effective and whether they need
 4 additional support, if this was how the London
 5 Resilience arrangements were working. But I was
 6 questioning in my mind whether the London Resilience had
 7 actually been pulled in or not. So that's something
 8 that I was starting to ask, and in fact saw wasn't
 9 happening later on.
 10 Q. Just on that point, do you consider that there was any
 11 issue with RED's situational awareness then?
 12 A. So, as I say, I think — so the role of RED is really to
 13 act as that liaison point between the strategic command
 14 group. I mean, we're now talking about the local
 15 authority response, so they would have been sitting on
 16 the strategic command group. That — I mean, the way it
 17 should have worked is that information was either being
 18 fed through that strategic command group. I mean,
 19 that's the way it should work, and partners will be
 20 spotting if things aren't working appropriately and will
 21 be feeding — that will be being fed into that meeting,
 22 captured in minutes and fed up to central government,
 23 that's the — and that's where RED would capture it.
 24 There's also — given our relationship in the
 25 department with local government, there's also the

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1 opportunity for people to feed in concerns direct. So
 2 I would have expected concerns to be coming in from the
 3 LGA or from other London councils or from London Gold,
 4 and, in fact, some messages, I believe, had started to
 5 be fed in to the department later on that Thursday.
 6 Q. So do you consider that this is something that RED
 7 should have been aware of?
 8 A. Well, RED weren't — I mean, I think there's
 9 a reflection by the department and we see in the
 10 department's statement about the role of RED and whether
 11 they should be resourced to do things differently.
 12 I think the way that they were resourced at the time was
 13 really to be a liaison point and, therefore, attend SCG
 14 meetings and feed that information back to government.
 15 I mean, they didn't operate in a way that they had any
 16 inspection functions of local government response.
 17 So when you look at other organisations, such as the
 18 Electoral Commission, for example, also very familiar to
 19 local government chief executives, not only will they
 20 oversee the election process, but they also have
 21 an inspection function that's allowed to — that goes to
 22 different elections to make sure that things are
 23 operating properly. I mean, RED certainly weren't
 24 resourced in that way, to have that inspection function.
 25 Q. Let's move on, please, and you'll have to help us with

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1 the sequence of events here.
 2 Is it the case that you then, after exchanging these
 3 messages, had a meeting with Nicholas Holgate?
 4 A. So I thought that we had arranged to have a meeting with
 5 Nicholas Holgate at that time, and certainly that had
 6 been the liaison with his office. When I arrived at
 7 the council, I found that he wasn't available to see me.
 8 So once I'd finished the meeting with Alok Sharma,
 9 I went to the meeting with Nicholas Holgate and found
 10 that Nicholas Holgate wasn't available to see me, so
 11 I spent some time with the member for housing, who
 12 happened to be there, and we spent some time with him,
 13 talked a bit about the council and how it operated
 14 normally. I asked him about the deference and calling
 15 people by their surnames, Mr Holgate, Ms Johnson. He
 16 said that had always been very normal in the council.
 17 So, again, it gave me the impression that officers had
 18 a strong role in the council and there was a lot of
 19 trust from members in officers and it wasn't operating
 20 in the same way as other councils.
 21 I don't blame the members for that, actually.
 22 I believe that's a — the culture of that council. It
 23 seemed unusual to me.
 24 Q. You're speaking quite fast.
 25 A. Sorry.

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1 Q. Could I just ask you to take it slightly slower.
 2 A. Of course.
 3 Q. Was there a time when you then had a meeting with
 4 Mr Holgate?
 5 A. Yes, so — yes, so —
 6 Q. Can you tell us what time roughly that was?
 7 A. So ... I'm ... so it would have been before
 8 John Barradell took over, so there was confirmation of
 9 that at 1.30, so maybe 12.30 to 1 o'clock. I thought
 10 I was seeing him about 11.30, I thought I'd arranged to
 11 see him, so it was after that time.
 12 Q. When you did eventually then meet with Mr Holgate, what
 13 did you discuss with him?
 14 A. Well, I mean, it was a strange meeting, in my view.
 15 So — because people were coming in and out of the
 16 office, I found it hard to gain his attention.
 17 Q. Was he in his office or in the BECC?
 18 A. He was in his office, which seemed to have been set up
 19 as a sort of Gold Command. There seemed to be a link to
 20 another office. John Barradell was in and out,
 21 I noticed, which ... so that was happening. So there
 22 were then conversations going on with Nicholas Holgate
 23 and John Barradell and others, while I'm trying to have
 24 this meeting. So it was very hard to kind of ascertain
 25 what support was needed. But it did show me that,

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1 actually, they just needed some organisation and
 2 experience and somebody overseeing the Gold arrangements
 3 in RBKC.
 4 Q. You've mentioned Mr Barradell was coming in and out and
 5 speaking to Mr Holgate; was he introduced to you?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. How was he introduced to you?
 8 A. As John Barradell from London Gold.
 9 Q. Was any official title given to him?
 10 A. No.
 11 Q. Did you know why he was there?
 12 A. So I was told that he was there looking at the
 13 arrangements and with the purpose of giving some support
 14 to Nicholas Holgate as the council lead.
 15 Q. Was that Mr Holgate that told you that?
 16 A. I think it was John Barradell, actually. It was in the
 17 middle of these conversations.
 18 Q. So Mr Barradell told you that he was there to support;
 19 what did you think of that?
 20 A. Well, I thought that — actually, I thought they really
 21 needed an experienced specialist emergency manager who
 22 was going to be able to run the Council Gold
 23 arrangements in a way that I would normally have
 24 expected it to be run. I mean, Nicholas Holgate had
 25 clearly been working really hard for a number of days,

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1 with — at that point it became clear that he hadn't had
 2 the rota arrangement, the help of other chief
 3 executives, and it wasn't clear, actually, that — to
 4 me, that he had requested help from John Barradell or
 5 that John was taking over as Local Authority Gold. It
 6 seemed to me that my impression was — and maybe I'm not
 7 clear on this point, but my impression was that
 8 Nicholas Holgate was retaining Local Authority Gold and
 9 John Barradell was there to support.
 10 Q. What did you think should happen?
 11 A. So I thought, as I say, that they should have a —
 12 someone, such as John Barradell, with experience should
 13 be taking over as Local Authority Gold, with the
 14 agreement of the council. I thought that would have
 15 seemed sensible. As I said, if London Resilience
 16 arrangements were invoked a few days before and there
 17 had been a rota system, actually that may have worked.
 18 But at this time you have a chief executive who's been
 19 managing the situation and is now tired after
 20 three days. Things aren't happening as they should be.
 21 It felt to me that it would be really beneficial to have
 22 a fresh pair of eyes and some experience to run the
 23 recovery bit of the operation, which is obviously, given
 24 my role, the part that I was particularly concerned to
 25 look at.

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1 Q. So what did you do?
 2 A. So I had a conversation with John Barradell —
 3 Q. Was that with him alone?
 4 A. With him alone, outside of Nicholas Holgate's office.
 5 So we had a conversation, and John agreed with me,
 6 actually, that it would be sensible for someone like him
 7 to be the Gold Commander. He then mentioned that if he
 8 took over, there would be a rota system. I questioned
 9 that and said, "Wouldn't it be better to have one person
 10 in the lead and then the rota as support, so that
 11 there's one point of contact, given the magnitude of the
 12 situation, and consistency?" He agreed with that. He
 13 said that would need to be agreed with London Councils.
 14 So I rang John O'Brien —
 15 Q. Who is John O'Brien?
 16 A. The chief executive of London Councils, and we had
 17 a conversation about this, and he also agreed. In fact,
 18 he said that London Councils and London Resilience had
 19 spotted that things weren't as they should be, hence
 20 John Barradell coming to support Nicholas Holgate, and
 21 he agreed that it would be good to have one point of
 22 contact to steer the operation. I left it at that.
 23 I think at that point I phoned Melanie and
 24 Katherine Richardson, possibly, but I know I had phone
 25 calls. When I went back into the room, the situation

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1 had changed and John Barradell was then leading, taking
 2 over as Gold Commander. I felt very relieved about
 3 that. I thought that was the right thing in the
 4 situation.
 5 Q. Just going back ever so slightly.
 6 You mentioned that you've had this conversation with
 7 Mr Barradell and Mr John O'Brien over the phone. How
 8 had you left it with Mr O'Brien and Mr Barradell? What
 9 was your expectation?
 10 A. So Mr Barradell said that I would need to speak to
 11 John O'Brien, and John O'Brien said, "Leave it with me",
 12 which I did for half an hour, even less, and, as I say,
 13 when I came back into the room, things were different,
 14 and that was really good news, as far as I was
 15 concerned.
 16 Q. How was it different and who told you it was different?
 17 A. So at that point, then, John Barradell, with
 18 Nicholas Holgate in the room, I believe it was
 19 John Barradell — or it might have been
 20 Nicholas Holgate, actually, that said, "John Barradell
 21 is taking over as Local Authority Gold", and that
 22 Nicholas was going to then help him — support him, so
 23 the roles had changed around, so was going to support
 24 him, and by that time then we heard that there was going
 25 to be a Prime Minister—chaired meeting at 2 o'clock and

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1 that John would take the lead for Local Authority Gold
 2 at that meeting.
 3 So all of this I found very reassuring, and in fact
 4 I also saw John speaking to someone and talking about
 5 the type of support he needed to bring in. So, again,
 6 also very reassuring.
 7 Q. Was this operating within the LLAG arrangements as you
 8 knew them to be, or was this something outside?
 9 A. Well, no, they were — this looked more normal, in terms
 10 of the LLAG arrangements. So, you know, whether
 11 councils — I presume councils are usually more
 12 proactive in asking for support, but very early on in
 13 an incident, it seems to me that the LLAG arrangements
 14 in London are operating more on this footing, albeit
 15 with a rota basis, not always with a permanent lead
 16 chief executive.
 17 Q. I would like to take you, then — we've been to it
 18 before — to a text message at {CLG00030647}. We can
 19 see there at 1.25 you sent a message, I believe this is
 20 to Melanie Dawes:
 21 "All good here now with JB leading Council gold.
 22 I am reassured and am currently sorting out his
 23 appointment with London Councils. Jo."
 24 What did you have to arrange with London Councils?
 25 A. So that was the bit about: are they happy — which

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1 I think was — well, I'm sure was in their remit: are
 2 they happy for one Gold Commander, albeit with a rota
 3 system of support, that that was outside of their usual
 4 arrangements? So, you know, there would have to be some
 5 agreement to that, probably with RBKC. But that — so
 6 that's what I was talking to John O'Brien about, and he
 7 seemed to think that that wasn't an issue. So I believe
 8 I had two conversations with John O'Brien.
 9 Q. You say that you were sorting out his appointment and
 10 you've explained that you spoke to Mr O'Brien, that
 11 there had to be an agreement; was that your
 12 understanding?
 13 A. Yes, that was my understanding, and John Barradell
 14 certainly told me that in order for that type of
 15 arrangement to happen, there had to be an agreement, and
 16 the appropriate person to speak to would be
 17 John O'Brien, so that's what I did.
 18 Q. After these exchanges and after you had heard what the
 19 arrangement was going to be, did your involvement cease
 20 that day?
 21 A. So I stayed for some of the Gold meeting, and then
 22 I believe I had a phone call, so I — and I can't
 23 remember who the phone call was with. I know I spoke to
 24 Alok Sharma again that day, but that may have been
 25 earlier, and I know I spoke several times to Melanie,

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1 but she would have been in that Gold meeting. But I had
 2 another phone call about the situation, and then that
 3 was the end of my involvement — that was the end of my
 4 involvement at the council. There were other things
 5 that day later on, but ...
 6 Q. Just to finish off with the conversations about
 7 Mr Barradell, {CLG00030626}. We can see here a message
 8 between you and Katherine Richardson where you say:
 9 "John just said the Red contact so your usual level.
 10 Let M know we have spoken and you're arranging. It will
 11 be the person on the SCG I guess."
 12 What was that about?
 13 A. So John Barradell, really usefully, I think, and not
 14 generally RED's role, but asked if he could have
 15 a permanent RED contact embedded in his team. That
 16 wasn't something that we usually did, but I agreed that
 17 and he said that that — later on he said that had been
 18 exceptionally helpful, and I believe the department has
 19 reflected on that.
 20 Q. You mentioned earlier, indeed, Ms Dawes sent you
 21 a message saying, "Feel free to make a massive Whitehall
 22 offer"; what was the massive Whitehall offer that you
 23 made?
 24 A. No, so I didn't make a massive Whitehall offer. I think
 25 my — what I felt that Melanie and, in fact, Sajid Javid

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1 as well were saying is that, you know, "Feel free to
2 make a call, a judgement call", and I felt that, for me,
3 making sure the right leadership was in place and that
4 they then would be very happy to ask what was needed of
5 Whitehall, that was — that seemed to be the most
6 sensible thing for me to do, and that's what I did. In
7 fact, John then did assess the level of support that
8 they needed from Whitehall, starting off with the RED
9 contact, so I agreed that, and then there were several
10 contacts after that with Melanie and others where the
11 support of central government was drawn in.

12 So I think that this change in leadership was really
13 significant.

14 Q. You mentioned the term "soft power" earlier; what did
15 you mean by that?

16 A. So it's — so I had no formal power, and I don't —
17 I really believe I didn't overstep the mark or do
18 anything outside of, you know, normal governance, but
19 I feel I had the right conversations and it encouraged
20 people to do the right thing, and it was probably the
21 quickest way of making sure the right leadership was in
22 place. As we spoke about earlier, it's not always quick
23 to bring in commissioners to take over a council, but
24 the most important thing is you have strong leadership
25 and that you have really clear governance arrangements

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1 when you're overseeing this problem, and — these
2 incidents, and that's something I've learnt, both as
3 a chief executive and in central government.

4 So, for me, it was absolutely critical to have those
5 things in place, and that's why I was so reassured when
6 the arrangements changed.

7 Q. You mentioned there the commissioners, and there was
8 a discussion earlier about it. Did you at any point
9 give consideration to the powers under section 5 of the
10 Civil Contingencies Act? Is that something that was
11 considered, to your knowledge?

12 A. Can you remind me, can I see what that is in —

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. So that I don't refer to the wrong thing. Thank you.

15 (Pause)

16 Q. Let me take you to {CAB00004616/7}. If we could go to
17 section 5. Section 5(1):

18 "A Minister of the Crown may by order require
19 a person or body listed in Part 1 of Schedule 1 to
20 perform a function of that person or body for the
21 purpose of ..."

22 And in this context it would be:

23 "(c) taking other action in connection with
24 an emergency."

25 Or subsection (b):

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1 "Reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of
2 an emergency ..."

3 Was any consideration given to the minister's power
4 under this section?

5 A. So there may have been. As I say, there was a structure
6 in place in central government and it's quite possible
7 that that was discussed. I mean, my — and at that
8 point, the local — I think at that point, the SCG was
9 still being — it was still in the response phase, so
10 was being managed by the police. I think it would have
11 been unusual for a Minister of the Crown to take over
12 that part of the response. I think — and there may
13 have been conversations about the council. I know the
14 concerns about the council were increasing. My concern
15 was to make sure that they had the right leadership in
16 place, which I think then reduced the need for this to
17 take place.

18 I think if the change had not been made, then we —
19 I can — I imagine that government would have looked or
20 considered taking different action in —

21 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Well, that might have been quite
22 a long-winded way of doing anything, mightn't it?
23 Because I think I'm right in saying that an order under
24 section 5 has to be made by a statutory instrument,
25 subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

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1 A. No, that's absolutely right, and so it may have taken,
2 even at its — even if it was prioritised and done
3 really quickly, it wouldn't have happened in hours. So
4 it seemed to me that the most —

5 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Well, it wouldn't have happened in
6 days, would it, under the affirmative resolution
7 procedure?

8 A. I think you're absolutely right, Mr Chairman, and so for
9 me, making sure the right leadership was in place as
10 quickly as possible seemed to be the most important
11 thing, and therefore it seemed important to intervene in
12 the way that I did.

13 MS MALHOTRA: Can you recall if parliament was sitting at
14 this time?

15 A. I can't recall, actually.

16 Q. I'd like to move on, please, and take you to your
17 witness statement. It's the penultimate paragraph, so
18 {CLG00003436}. Forgive me, an email. If you could
19 scroll down to the next page, it should be on page 2
20 {CLG00003436/2}:

21 "The meeting with housing was managed well, despite
22 it being understandably fraught."

23 This is the message in respect of the meeting with
24 Laura Johnson.

25 You then go on in the next two paragraphs:

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1 "We are putting a person from RED in the response
2 team to support John and act as a link back to central
3 government."
4 Is this the role that Ms McManus then subsequently
5 went to fill?
6 A. Yes. Yes, I believe so, yes.
7 Q. Then right at the very end of that email, you say:
8 "Having been quite concerned this morning about the
9 Council's ability to manage a situation of such
10 magnitude, I am much more reassured now that they have
11 the support of John B [Barradell] — who has experience
12 of managing emergency situations. You could see that
13 a proper structure was being put in place."
14 Would you agree that after 16 June, your involvement
15 then subsided?
16 A. Yes, to a large extent. There were other things that
17 I did after 16 June, but this was my main involvement in
18 the — in that week.
19 Q. You say in your first witness statement,
20 {CLG00030414/22}, paragraph 106:
21 "In my opinion, RBKC's response to the fire was
22 inadequate."
23 Do you still stand by that assessment?
24 A. Yes.
25 Q. What was inadequate about it?

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1 A. So this was — is now in the benefit of all the
2 information I now have, but I believe not drawing in the
3 support of others, particularly the London Gold
4 arrangements, meant that the council struggled to
5 provide the response that it needed. It didn't have
6 other experienced people to help and, therefore, was
7 unable to respond, particularly in the first few days,
8 to the size of the incident.
9 Q. Do you think that DCLG RED operated effectively in the
10 response to the fire?
11 A. So I believe that RED was resourced and — to act in
12 a certain way, and I personally saw the efforts of RED,
13 and particularly Katherine Richardson and her team, and
14 I know how hard they worked during that period.
15 I believe they carried out the functions that they were
16 required to do, and I believe they also went above that.
17 But I think the department's reflected in its final
18 statement on, you know, whether the role of RED should
19 be different to that. But at that point, they were
20 resourced to be a liaison point between the SCG and
21 central government, and I believe that that's what they
22 did.
23 Q. Do you consider, given the refusals of support by
24 Mr Holgate on more than one occasion, that intervention
25 by DCLG could have happened sooner?

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1 A. Well, I mean, I think as we've discussed, intervention
2 is actually quite hard. I mean, we were just talking
3 about intervention under the Civil Contingencies Act —
4 Q. Intervention in the sense of the action that you then
5 subsequently took; do you think that could have happened
6 sooner?
7 A. So the action that I personally took?
8 Q. Yes.
9 A. Possibly, if I — it's difficult to say, actually.
10 I mean, I'm really pleased that I went there on the
11 Friday and was able to see those things, on the — would
12 I — I mean, I was therefore able to meet with the
13 leader, other councillors. A number of the judgements
14 I made were based on the things that happened on the
15 Friday. In the middle of the incident on the Wednesday
16 or the Thursday, would I have seen those things so
17 clearly? I mean, that's something I ask myself. I do
18 think that the value — I think the department has
19 learnt something about the value of experience. I think
20 even I, with the experience, hadn't realised how
21 significant that could be, and I think that's something
22 that, you know, we have all reflected on.
23 MS MALHOTRA: Well, thank you, Dr Farrar. Those are the
24 questions I have prepared for you.
25 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right. So we need to have a break

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1 at this point.
2 Dr Farrar, just so that you understand, when counsel
3 gets to the end of her questions, we have to have
4 a short break, first to let her check that she hasn't
5 left anything out, but also to allow other people who
6 are following the proceedings from elsewhere to suggest
7 questions that perhaps we ought to put to you.
8 So we'll stop now. I think we'll combine it with
9 the afternoon break, shall we?
10 MS MALHOTRA: Yes.
11 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: And take a little longer than we
12 might otherwise do for this. We'll come back at 3.15,
13 and at that point we'll see if there are any more
14 questions for you.
15 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much.
16 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right?
17 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
18 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Would you go with the usher, then,
19 please.
20 (Pause)
21 Thank you very much. 3.15, then, please.
22 Thank you.
23 (3.02 pm)
24 (A short break)
25 (3.15 pm)

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1 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, Dr Farrar. Well, we'll
 2 see if there are any more questions we need to ask you,
 3 shall we?
 4 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
 5 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes, Ms Malhotra.
 6 MS MALHOTRA: Two questions, please.
 7 We've heard earlier you said that you were
 8 a chief executive and the experience that you received
 9 as a result of being a chief executive and responding to
 10 emergencies. Can you help us with whether you received
 11 training when you were a chief executive on civil
 12 contingencies?
 13 A. Yes, on a number of occasions.
 14 Q. Did you attend EPC, for example, the Emergency Planning
 15 College?
 16 A. I did on one occasion. I also had training by different
 17 providers on two other occasions at least.
 18 Q. The final question is: is there anything else that you
 19 would like to add to your evidence that may be relevant
 20 to the Inquiry's investigation?
 21 A. I think I'd like to make two comments and probably three
 22 lessons, if that's okay.
 23 So, first of all, I'd like to thank the Inquiry for
 24 inviting me and for allowing me to give evidence.
 25 I feel that that has been really important and you have

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1 helped me to give my evidence in what I feel has been
 2 a very positive way.
 3 The second thing, which I wasn't able to mention at
 4 the beginning, is just my admiration of the bereaved and
 5 survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire. I met a number of
 6 them since the incident happened. I've always been so
 7 impressed by their bravery and by their commitment to
 8 find answers. I've always found them to be very
 9 positive and an inspirational group of people to work
 10 with.
 11 I think my three lessons. First of all, we've
 12 talked about this, but is the importance of experience,
 13 and I'm not sure I realised how important that was until
 14 that Friday. I'm glad I have been able to talk about
 15 that, and I know the department has reflected on that in
 16 terms of its evidence and about building that in to its
 17 response.
 18 I think the other thing that I would like to reflect
 19 on, the second thing, is the importance of being really
 20 clear about roles and responsibilities, so being clear
 21 who is the Local Authority Gold, being clear about when
 22 and how to bring in support, and being clear through
 23 that strategic command group of asking for support when
 24 it's necessary.
 25 I think the last point I would reflect on is the

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1 absolute essential important nature of having a visible
 2 presence for people who are impacted by incidents such
 3 as this. It's so important for the community to know
 4 who to go to and to be able to ask for help and
 5 information. I think that will greatly help to reduce
 6 distress in what is a really, really difficult
 7 situation.
 8 So thank you very much.
 9 MS MALHOTRA: Thank you very much for coming to give your
 10 evidence today and for assisting us with our
 11 investigation.
 12 THE WITNESS: Thank you. Thank you.
 13 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: And I would like to add my thanks to
 14 you on behalf of the panel. It's been very useful to
 15 hear what you have to tell us. We've learned quite
 16 a lot about the events of those few days after the fire
 17 which I think we were unclear about, so you have really
 18 added to our store of knowledge, and it's been very
 19 interesting to hear what you have to tell us generally.
 20 So thank you very much indeed for coming and giving us
 21 your team.
 22 THE WITNESS: Thank you. Thank you all very much.
 23 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: You're now free to go, of course.
 24 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
 25 (The witness withdrew)

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1 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Well, Ms Malhotra, we don't have
 2 another witness today; is that right?
 3 MS MALHOTRA: No, we don't, but we do tomorrow.
 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: We have one tomorrow morning. So we
 5 will stop at that point for today and we'll resume at
 6 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.
 7 Thank you very much. 10 o'clock tomorrow morning,
 8 then, please.
 9 (3.22 pm)
 10 (The hearing adjourned until 10 am
 11 on Thursday, 26 May 2022)
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