OPUS₂

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY RT

Day 285

May 26, 2022

Opus 2 - Official Court Reporters

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1 Thursday, 26 May 2022 2 (10.00 am) SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's hearing. Today we're going to hear evidence 4 5 from Dame Melanie Dawes who, at the time of the fire, 6 was the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government. 8 Yes, Mr Millett. 9 MR MILLETT: Yes, Mr Chairman, good morning. Good morning, 10 members of the panel. 11 I now call, please, Dame Melanie Dawes. DAME MELANIE DAWES (affirmed) 12 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. Now, please 13 sit down and make yourself comfortable. 14 15 (Pause) 16 Is that chair not --17 THE WITNESS: I'll just bring it down slightly. SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right? 18 19 THE WITNESS: Thank you. SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, Mr Millett. 2.0 21 Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY 22 MR MILLETT: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. 2.3 Dame Melanie, good morning. Can I start by thanking 2.4 you very much for coming yet again to give evidence to 2.5 the public inquiry. We are extremely grateful to you. 1 You are, I think, one of a handful of factual witnesses 2 who have been asked and have been good enough to come 3 more than once, so you will know what I'm about to tell 4 you, but I will nonetheless repeat it. 5

First, could I ask you, please, to keep your voice up so that the transcriber can get your evidence down clearly on the transcript. Also not to nod or shake your head; you have to say "Yes" or "No", as the case may be.

We will be taking breaks during the course of the day at the usual time, but if you feel you need a break at any other time, we can take a break.

Finally, if there is anything I ask you which you don't understand or you would like me to repeat or put in a different way, I can do that.

Now, you have made three statements to the Inquiry, the first two of which relate to this module. Module 4. and your third statement relates to Module 6, which you were asked about by Kate Grange Queen's Counsel when you gave evidence in Module 6 in March of this year. I won't be asking you about that statement, but I will be asking you about your first two statements, which will appear on the screen in front of you, as will all

of the documents to which I'm going to take you. Let's go to that first statement, then. It's at 1 {CLG00030653}. Is that your first witness statement

2. dated 20 May 2019?

A. Yes. it is.

4 $\mathsf{Q}.\;\;\mathsf{If}\;\;\mathsf{we}\;\mathsf{go},\;\mathsf{please},\;\mathsf{to}\;\mathsf{page}\;39,\;\mathsf{you}\;\mathsf{can}\;\mathsf{see}\;\mathsf{a}\;\mathsf{signature}$ 5

above the date. Is that your signature?

6 A. Yes. it is.

7 Q. Your second statement is at {CLG00030784}, dated

8 3 November 2020. Is that the first page of your second

witness statement?

10 A. Yes, it is

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11 Q. Thank you.

12 If we go, please, to page 15, you can see 13

a signature there above the date, although it's

14 an electronic signature. Can you please confirm that it

15 is yours?

A. Yes, it is mine. 16

17 Q. Thank you.

18 Have you had the opportunity to read these

19 statements recently?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Can you confirm that the contents of each of these

22 statements is true?

23 A. Yes.

2.4 Q. Thank you.

2.5 Now, I just want to ask you one or two further

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1 questions about your background. We've heard quite

2 a lot of evidence already about it, but just to confirm:

3 at the time of the fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017,

4 you were the civil service head of the Department for

5 Communities and Local Government, DCLG; yes?

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7 Q. Yes, and that was a role I think you had held since 8

1 March 2015

9 A Yes

10 Q. You left that post in February 2020; yes?

11 A. Yes.

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12 Q. At the time of the fire , then, you were -- is this

13 ${\sf right?} \; -- \; {\sf responsible} \; {\sf for} \; {\sf the} \; {\sf overall} \; {\sf leadership} \; \; {\sf and} \; \;$

14 management of the department.

15 A. Yes, at the civil service level, yes.

16 Q. At a civil service level, yes.

> Now, looking at the structure of the DCLG at the time of the fire, is it right that there were three

19 commands across the department, each led by a director

20 general?

21 A. Yes, that's correct.

Q. We've heard a little bit of that in Module 6, but just 2.2

23 to recap, and help me with this and confirm, the first

24 of those commands, I think, was housing and planning,

25 led by Helen MacNamara; yes?

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- 1 A. Yes.
- Q. The second was local government and public services, led 2
- 3 by Dr Jo Farrar; yes?
- 4 A Yes
- 5 Q. And we heard from her yesterday.
- Is it right that the third was Simon Ridley leading 6
- 7 on economic growth and devolution?
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 Q. Yes. I think there were also three director-led
- 10 commands who oversaw corporate activities, including
- 11 finance, human resources and strategy.
- 12 A. Yes.
- 13 Q. That's correct, is it?
- 14 A. Yes, it is correct.
- 15 Q. They all reported to you, did they?
- 16 A Yes
- 17 Q. In relation to ministers. I think it's right that the
- 18 department had five Ministers of State; yes?
- 19 A. I believe so. Sometimes we had six, sometimes we had
- 20 five during that period, but, yes, I think it was five 2.1 at the time.
- 2.2 Q. Very well.
- One of those ministers at the time was Alok Sharma 2.3
- 2.4 MP, who was Minister of State for Housing and Planning.
- 25

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- 1 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ Yes. He, I think, was appointed on 13 June 2017, so the
- 2 day before the fire .
- 3 A. Yes, in the evening.
- Q. In the evening? 5 A. Yes
- Q. Right. So he was in post for a matter of hours? 6
- 7 A Yes
- 8 Q. Is it right that the Secretary of State for the
- 9 department was Saiid Javid MP?
- 10
- 11 Q. And he had been appointed on 14 July 2016, so he had
- 12 been in post for nine months or so.
- 13 A. Yes, he was reappointed after the general election in
- 14
- 15 Q. And reappointed after the general election, which
- 16 happened, I think, on 8 June.
- 17
- 18 Q. They were both key ministers in responding to the
- 19 Grenfell Tower fire; yes?
- A. Yes, they were. 2.0
- 21 Q. Now, if you go, please, to your first witness statement.
- 2.2 page 36 {CLG00030653/36}, paragraph 120, you say this at
- 23 the foot of the page, you say:
- 24 "In addition, the fact that some ministers were
- 25 newly appointed also made their jobs harder in the early

days, as they learnt about the issues for which they

- 2 were responsible at the same time as getting to grips
- 3 with the situation created by the fire. In my opinion,
- 4 the Department was very lucky to have Alok Sharma and
- 5 Sajid Javid as our two key ministers at the time. The fact that the Secretary of State already knew the 6
- 7 Department, and had strong working relationships with
- the senior team, was essential. His and Alok Sharma's 8
 - wholehearted commitment to helping the individuals and
- 10 families affected was clear from the start.'
- 11 Now, is it your recollection that the very recent
- 12 appointment before the fire of the Minister of State for
- 13 Housing and Planning, namely Alok Sharma, had an impact
- 14 in any way on the department's ability to respond to the 15 fire?
- A. Well, it certainly had an impact on Alok Sharma himself. 16 17 He arrived, to the best of my recollection, for the
- 18 first time in the department on that Wednesday morning.
- 19 and, of course, was dealing with some of the issues in
- 2.0 North Kensington, but was also the lead Minister of
- 21 State on all the issues to do with building safety that
- 22 we were dealing with at the time. So he had a very, 23
- very steep learning curve to get through. I believe my 2.4
- colleagues in the department, and particularly
- 2.5 Helen MacNamara, were supporting him, did a very good

- 1 job in helping him with that, but he had an enormous
- 2 amount of material to absorb. I think he did that
- 3 extremely well, but I'm sure he would have wished that
- he had had, you know, more time to get across the brief
 - before the crisis hit.

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- 6 Q. Looked at coolly, did the gradient of his learning curve
- 7 have an adverse effect on his response to the fire, or
- 8 the department's ability , perhaps, to respond to the
- 9 fire in the early hours?
- 10 I can't honestly think of any issue where Alok's newness
- 11 in the role made a difference. I spoke to him a number
- 12 of times and I thought he was very, very quick to get to 13 the heart of the issues that he was addressing. But,
- you know, as I said, it made his life a lot harder. 14
- 15 I should add that the Prime Minister had no choice 16 but to appoint a new housing minister, because
- 17 Gavin Barwell had been housing minister but had lost his
- 18 seat in the general election the previous week, so the
- 19 vacancy had to be filled somehow.
- 2.0 $\mathsf{Q}.\ \mathsf{Right}.\ \mathsf{I'm}$ going to turn to a different subject.
- 21 Before I do, can I just ask you, your voice is 2.2 coming through a little bit dim to where I'm sitting.
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- 24 It may just be the angle to which you're sitting, so far
 - as the microphone is concerned.

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- 1 A. Let me try --2 Q. That's better. 3 A. Okay, my apologies. 4 Q. Not at all. That's better, thank you. 5 Now, can I turn, then, to the subject of RED. 6 It's right that within the DCLG -- and that may be 7 a question -- sits something called RED, the resilience 8 and emergencies division; is that right? 9 A. Yes. 10 Q. Did you have a role in the operating function of RED in 11 June or as at June 2017? 12 A. Not specifically, no. I was not part of the command 13 structure, but RED was located within DCLG and, as 14 I think you may be hinting, it was effectively 15 a cross-government resource, and that's how I always saw 16 it, and it was part of the overall civil contingencies 17 machinery which was, of course, headed and led at 18 a strategic level and at an operational level in the 19 Cabinet Office, but RED's role was at the local level. 2.0 to do the liaison with local resilience fora and then, 21 in a crisis, to be the main point of liaison between
 - department and their leadership individuals were part of

central and local government. So I always saw RED as

effectively pointing towards the overall Cabinet Office

leadership, but the people were clearly part of our

- 1 my senior team.
- 2. Q. I think you have answered my next question, but just to 3 tick them off: Katherine Richardson, deputy director --
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- 5 Q. -- reported to you?
- A. Yes, she reported to Jillian Kay, who reported to 6 7 Jo Farrar.
- 8 Q. Right. Perfect. Exactly.
- 9 Then turning to the function of DCLG -- well, sorry, 10 before I move on, did any of those individuals report 11 across government, for example to anybody in the CCS? 12
 - A. No, I don't think they did. I think that's a good question. I think Jillian Kay had wider responsibilities, and not just for RED, as a director. Katherine Richardson's role was entirely within RED. But I don't recall there being anything like a dotted line, for example, which could have provided some management oversight and feedback and so on as part of performance reporting, I don't recall that, and I think it's a good question as to whether that could have been helpful.
- 2.2 Q. Thank you.
- 23 Looking at DCLG and its function, what is the 2.4 department's function when an emergency occurs? It's 25 a broad question, but can you enlighten us?

A. Well, firstly, there is RED, of course, and their main function is to provide liaison between local responders and the centre of government, and of course that varies depending on the nature of the crisis, but that's one part of what DCLG was supposed to do. As I say, very much on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

And then we also held a number of, if you like, capabilities . So I would include in that the Bellwin financing scheme. We were there to hold that system and to work out when that financing system needed to be deployed in response to a request from local responders, local government.

In addition to that -- and I think some of this was not as clear as it could have been at the time, if I'm honest -- there were -- there was, of course, the national risk assessment and the national risk register. and DCLG, as then was, was -- had been the recovery lead for some emergencies over the preceding years, and I particularly remember the floods of 2015/2016, over that winter, when we took up the recovery lead role. I remember that being a decision that was taken at the time, it wasn't automatic, but I knew at the time that the fire hit that we were likely to have a role in co-ordinating cross-government efforts on recovery. But I don't believe that was as clear at the time, to be

1 honest, as it might have been.

And then, finally, there were certain risks on the national risk register of which we were a part. I think in 2016/2017 we were the designated lead government department for response for returning British nationals or others arriving from overseas, but not in any other risk, and so we had capabilities in RED able to discharge that risk should it have materialised and should we have needed to swing in to lead any government response on it.

- 11 Right. In light of that answer, was RED the DCLG 12 element which might respond in the response phase to 13 emergencies arising out of risks other than returning 14 nationals?
- 15 A. I don't think so, no. Not automatically anyway. So 16 I would draw a distinction between RED, which was 17 a capability for the whole of government and very much 18 part of the overall system of oversight for civil 19 contingencies headed by the Cabinet Office -- by the 2.0 way, I should add that one thing I don't think was 21 a problem here was the lack of such a system or of an 2.2 understanding of it in the way that there was a lack on 23 building safety. It's quite different. There was

a system; I think the question is whether or not it had

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25 any holes in it which need to be addressed and still

hadn't been addressed, but perhaps we'll come on to some of that.

But I would distinguish between that role and the role that we then played in the days following the fire on what I would call the department's core responsibilities. So that included housing, including temporary accommodation, and it included some of the things we did in working with other departments to set up the victims unit later in the week.

And we could have, and sort of did, lodge that victims unit alongside the RED capabilities, but I don't think it would ever be automatic for the department to have it. I think it's quite important to have a separation between RED and its role and things the department might do as part of a response or recovery effort alongside.

- Q. Yes, I see. We may come back to the victims unit laterin your evidence and examine what happened there.
- 19 A. Yes.

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- Q. But coming back to the question of recovery which you
 have mentioned, was it the case that DCLG's involvement
 in the recovery phase after an emergency would be
 dictated by the national risk register?
- A. So my recollection is that the national risk register
 had us as the recovery lead for floods, and I think the

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- understanding was that we were likely to be the recovery lead for other crises, particularly those happening at a local level, which are being led by a local authority on the ground. But I don't remember that latter, more general default role for DCLG really being written down, and I'm not sure it was very clear.
- Q. I see. Well, let's look at that a little bit more
 closely in looking at the lead government department.

Just before I do that, do you remember, at the time of the fire, was DCLG involved in any other recovery phase, any other emergency?

- A. We had, through RED, mobilised throughout the summer
 following the series of terror attacks at London Bridge
 and in Manchester, and also earlier in the year.
- 14 and in Manchester, and also earlier in the year,
 15 I recall, Westminster Bridge am I right about that?
 16 But perhaps the timing was different, but there had
 17 been a series of other attacks. So we had mobilised
 18 quite a lot, along with the rest of Whitehall, in
 19 response to those events.
- Q. Right. Does that mean that your staff in RED were, to
 some extent, already deployed in the recovery processes
 after those emergencies?
- A. I don't recall whether there was very much by way of
 recovery for Manchester and London Bridge. My
 recollection is that the local authority and other

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responders were very much leading on that.

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One small thing that we were still involved with was
the remaining work following the floods of 2015/2016,
because there was continued support needed for local
families, local businesses, and we were holding — still
holding a very small and I believe almost complete set

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7 of actions and duties on that.

8 Q. Did the continuing role of the DCLG — or RED, perhaps,
9 but I think DCLG generally — in attending to the
10 recovery phase of those emergencies have an adverse
11 effect on resourcing in order to deal with either the

 $\begin{array}{ll} 12 & & \text{response or the recovery phase of the Grenfell Tower} \\ 13 & & \text{fire} \,? \end{array}$

involved in it would -- you know, I would not want to say -- I would not want to disagree with them if they

I don't think so, no, but those who were more directly

said they did feel it had had an impact, because they
would be better placed to say. I think what definitely

19 was the case was that people were very tired. There had

been a series of events to respond to and, of course,

there was the Finsbury Park attack the following week as well, so I think it had been a relentless few months for

RED and, indeed, for the civil contingencies secretariat

in the Cabinet Office.

25 Q. Turning, then, to the topic of lead government

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department. We've heard evidence from Katharine Hammond from the CCS about that.

At the time of the fire, was DCLG acting as the lead government department in any other existing emergency?

A. Apart from the very small remaining legacy issues on thefloods, no.

Q. What did you understand the role of the lead governmentdepartment to be?

9 A. The lead government department for response -- is that 10 what you're referring to, or recovery?

11 Q. Well, take response first .

12 A. Take the two. Okay.

So the lead government department for response, of course, DCLG didn't really have any of those responsibilities , apart from that quite narrow question of handling people arriving from overseas, but my understanding is that such a department should have got plans in place, should have thought about the sorts of issues that would arise, should be thinking about who they were turning to to lead the recovery effort and part of their response planning, and would be liaising with the Cabinet Office on working out whether or not the COBR machinery needed to be mobilised or any cross—government ministerial meetings needed to be

25 mobilised in response to a crisis .

- 1 Q. And as recovery? A. As recovery, I mean, that really does depend, and 3 of course a lot of the time there isn't a particular 4 need for central government to get involved in recovery, 5 but there, I would expect the recovery department to be 6 owning whatever the cross-government set of activities were that needed to be carried out, and if it was only 8 maybe one department involved, I wouldn't necessarily 9 expect there to be a very big cross-government recovery 10 effort to be needed. But for something like Grenfell Tower, or indeed the floods, you've got lots of 11 12 departments involved, the business department and all 13 sorts around the table, and so the role of the recovery 14 department is to co-ordinate that, with support from CCS 15 in the first instance, but actually in the end operating 16 on their own, because typically you're talking about 17 these things continuing over a long period of time. 18 Q. And Dr Farrar told us, I think, yesterday that the role 19 of a lead government department was to act as first 20 point of contact, but not to be operational on the
- 2.1 2.2 A. Oh, yes, that's absolutely clear. I should have said 2.3 that already, really. The key principle within all the 2.4 civil contingencies guidance and planning is that of

locally -led response, in terms of the substantive

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- 1 response that's needed to support the communities that 2 are affected
- 3 Q. Now, can I show you a document, {HOM00013085}, please. This is a document entitled "Departments
- 5 responsibilities for planning, response, and recovery
- 6 from emergencies, March 2009". Were you familiar with
- 7 this document?

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- A. Not particularly, no. 8
- 9 Q. It's a document, as you can see, prepared in March 2009, 10 but Katharine Hammond told us in her evidence that she 11 thought it was still current as at June 2017. Would 12 that accord with your recollection?
- A. Yes, especially if Katharine had confirmed that. 13
- Q. Right, I see. So you can't do better than her? You 14 15 can't confirm or -
- 16 A. No, I can't really add anything to her recollection, no. 17 She was much closer to that and to the operational 18 leadership of it .
- 19 Q. Right.

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Then let's go to page 5 {HOM00013085/5}, please, item 10, bottom of the page:

"Hazardous materials — Chemical, biological or radiological materials released other than as a result of terrorist activity and where not covered in 9 above or 11 below.'

9 above is "Radiation Hazards", and 11 below -- take 2 this from me -- is "Serious Industrial Accidents".

3 You can see from that that the lead government on 4 recovery -- the columns, I should just explain, are "Risk" in the left -hand column, central column is 5 "Response", and right-hand column is "Recovery". 6

The CLG is the lead government department for recovery "where mainly displaced people/wider disruption" occurs in relation to an event from a hazardous material. Does that accord with your recollection?

12 A. Yes. it does.

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Q. Over the page $\{HOM00013085/6\}$, if we look at item 11, 13 "Serious Industrial Accidents", you can see there that 14 15 it says (a) to (c), which is HSE, wider economic and 16 commercial impact, pollution arising from.

17 If you look at the very top on the right-hand side, 18 it says, "CLG if wide-ranging issues". Do you see that?

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20 Q. Then item 12, "Severe storms and weather", (a) to (c) is 21 impact on transport, impact on power, impact on built 22 environment, and then in the right-hand column: 23

"a-c: Significant recovery activity unlikely and 2.4 lead therefore likely to remain with response lead department unless otherwise determined if wide-ranging

1 consequences arise."

2 Now, they are examples, I think, of where the DCLG 3 is listed as a lead in the response.

A. In the recovery.

5 Q. Well, yes, in the recovery, in the recovery phase, as 6 LGD. Again, would that accord with your recollection, 7 looking at this document?

A. Well, yes, it would. I think, though, that it's 8 9 important to say that those are all conditional 10 statements, "if wide-ranging issues", "if significant 11 displacement of people" on the previous page. So my 12 understanding at the time was that there was probably 13 a default -- and I believe Katharine Hammond said this 14 in one of her witness statements -- that DCLG would lead 15 recovery in these sorts of circumstances, but I don't 16 think it was automatic, and that was why on the morning 17 of the fire I rang Jo Farrar or messaged her first thing 18 to say, "I think we'll be leading the recovery here", 19 because I didn't think it was automatic, and I thought 2.0 it was quite important that we stepped in straight away 21 and didn't wait to be asked, and that's what we did.

> However, I don't think it was clear, and I don't recall at any point anybody asking us to do that, and I don't particularly -- in fact, I don't at all recall the Home Office asking us -- as the lead department for

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1 response after Grenfell, talking to us as the recovery 2 partner. We just did it.

Q. Right.

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Now, just looking to the central column, the reason I asked you about response is because if you look at (c), "impact on built environment", "England", the response phase is with the CLG in the response phase. Do you see that?

- 9 A. In response to severe storms and weather, yes.
- 10 Q. Yes. So that is an example, isn't it, where the CLG is 11 the lead government department in the response phase, 12 albeit in a particular impact arising as a result of 13 severe storms and weather?
- 14 A. Yes. I have to say that I don't recall that happening 15 during the floods of 2015, when there was an impact on 16 the built environment, in the sense that people had to 17 leave their homes and businesses had to leave their 18 businesses, but DEFRA were firmly in the lead on the 19 response. What we pictured up were the recovery issues.

20 Q. Right, I see

2.1 Then if you go over the page to item 15, page 7 22 $\{HOM00013085/7\}$, you can see "Earthquakes", and there, 2.3 "England: CLG", in the response phase; yes?

2.4 A. Yes. I'm not sure that that column — sorry, that row was still there by the time of the 2016 risk assessment.

- 1 Q. Right.
- 2 A. Earthquakes, I mean. I don't recall that.
- 3 Q. Right
- If you go finally to page 9 {HOM00013085/9}, please, 5 item 24, this I think is the instance you were referring 6 to before, which is "Reception and Housing of UK Citizens evacuated from overseas", "England: CLG" in 7 8 both phases.
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. Both response and recovery.
- 11 A. Yes, and the department held capability to be able to 12 respond in those circumstances through RED.
- 13 Q. Right.

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- Now, looking at item 24 there, can you tell us whether the response and recovery for DCLG in the reception and housing of UK citizens evacuated from overseas would entail DCLG's involvement in housing those who had been displaced?
- 19 A. Yes, I think it would have done. In my time in DCLG, 2.0 I don't recall this becoming relevant, but I did, when 21 I was at the Cabinet Office prior to that, pick up as 2.2 one of my duties leading the emergency planning for 2.3 eurozone scenarios, which included the possibility of 2.4 countries in the eurozone leaving the eurozone and all
 - the potential monetary and fiscal consequences that

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- could have resulted from that, which may well have led 2 to citizens being evacuated and coming home to the UK. 3 So I remember at the time co-ordinating that from the 4 Cabinet Office, requiring DCLG to have their plans 5 ready, and that was definitely about liaising with local authorities. And it was quite challenging, because you 6 7 didn't know where exactly people might come home to and
- 8 what their housing needs might be. So I remember those 9 discussions at that point. Q. Now, I've shown you, I think, three examples of where
- 11 the CLG is lead department in the response phase: 12 there's severe storms and weather, impact on built
- 13 environment; earthquakes; and reception and housing of
- 14 UK citizens evacuated from overseas. Each of those,
- 15 I think, would have a rehousing aspect, wouldn't they?
- 16 A. Yes, they would. I'm really not sure though that the
- 17 earthquakes or, indeed, the built environment in 18 response to storms were still there at the time of the
- 19 2016/2017 risk register. My apologies if I'm wrong 2.0 about that, but my recollection is that the risk
- 21 register slightly changed and that what was left was
- 22 this one here under row 24.
- 23 But, yes, you're right, it would have involved 2.4 different forms of rehousing challenge. But I do -2.5 yes, and that would have been as much a recovery thing

- 1 as a response issue.
- 2 Q. It appears that, as Katharine Hammond told us, this
- 3 document remained the same in June 2017 as it had in
- March 2009. On that basis, just looking at the
- 5 paperwork, it seems as if the DCLG did have a lead role 6
- in the response phase of an emergency in those three
- 7 instances, and each of those, would you accept, involved
- 8 as an outcome, potentially, mass displacement of
- 9 individuals from their homes?
- 10 A. Yes, I would accept that, and indeed I observed that
- 11 during the floods. There were lots of people who needed
- 12 to be rehoused locally in the floods of 2015/2016, and
- 13 that was managed quite effectively, as $\ensuremath{\mathsf{I}}$ recall , by the
- 14 local councils, of which there were many, which were
- 15 involved

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- 16 Q. Just help us with this: is there or do you know whether
- 17 there was a system in place whereby this document would
 - be updated annually or biennially to reflect revisions
- 19 in the national risk register?
- 2.0 A. Well, the reason why I am perhaps a little bit,
- 21 you know, confused by this is that my understanding was 2.2 that the national risk register was updated quite
- 23 frequently, and that the most relevant version at the
- 2.4 time of the Grenfell Tower fire was an update from early

25 2017, for which the work had been done mostly during

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2016, and that that had changed the risks that -compared to the ones shown in this document. So I'm not going to disagree with those who were closer to this about which document was extant at the time, but my understanding was that the most relevant risk register was much more recent than this one.

Q. Thank you.

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Now, if we go to your first statement, we can move on with the point, at paragraph 14, please, page 5 {CLG00030653/5}. You say there in the first bullet

"There was no precedent for an emergency that left so many households homeless and in crisis. While the Department was not involved in providing emergency and temporary accommodation, we were quickly drawn into the longer-term rehousing challenge. I cannot recall another occasion when the Department had to work with a council on long-term rehousing of individual families

Would you agree that it's envisaged from the list of lead government departments that we've just been looking at that the DCLG are or are supposed to be involved in the recovery phase, at least, where complex matters or wide—ranging issues are involved, particularly housing?

A. Yes, if those issues are presented in response to

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events. However, I think you would always expect the council to be leading on those rehousing efforts, as indeed they did after Grenfell Tower. Even after the first week or so, they were still in the lead. So the department's role would have been to think about what support might be needed.

I still cannot recall any event where the department had to lean in so extensively on the longer-term rehousing challenge, and that was for a number of reasons after Grenfell, not least the fact that this was the most expensive housing market in the country that we were dealing with, and the need to rehouse people close to where they had lived before made it an extremely difficult challenge and a very expensive one, which was why the government leant in with so much resource.

So I still think -- I stand by this bullet. I still think that there was no precedent for quite the circumstances that we were faced and that the council was faced with after the Grenfell Tower fire.

Q. Right. Well, let's just see if we can take that in stages.

First, would you agree that it was envisaged from the documents we've been looking at that DCLG would be involved in the recovery stage where people were displaced, there was mass displacement?

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A. Yes, in those circumstances. Although, as I say,

I can't think of an example where that had happened, and

Day 285

3 where permanent rehousing was needed, because after the

4 floods, this was temporary rehousing, not permanent 5 rehousing that was needed.

Q. Yes, but we have also seen that the displacement could 6 7 include housing of UK citizens evacuated from overseas.

8 A. Yes, to the extent that any government or local 9 government support was needed for that, that was

10 potentially something that the government might have

needed to have got involved in, yes. 11

12 And do you agree that that could reasonably involve very 13 large numbers of people?

A. Well, as I said earlier, it could have done, but I think 14

15 the circumstances of Grenfell, where there was a very 16 large number of people requiring social housing, in

17 other words provided by the state and paid for and

18 subsidised by the state, in a local area and with so

19 many others whose homes were also damaged from the other

20 buildings surrounding Grenfell, I would not have

2.1 expected the -- for example, the movement of people

22 following a eurozone crisis to have had that same local,

23 very intense impact and need for the housing teams 2.4

locally. That was, I think, quite unusual. 25

And in the case of floods, often you're talking

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about people who own their own homes and whose first

port of call will, yes, perhaps be to go to hotels 2

provided for by their local council, but again, not with

the same level of trauma. I think that's the other

5 thing that's important that was very different about

6 Grenfell, that just made the whole set of circumstances

7 so difficult and so much more in need of central

8 government support in a number of different respects.

9 What I'm really trying to get at is whether you might 10 agree that the displacement of large numbers of people

11 was an outcome which the department might reasonably

12 have anticipated given its pre-determined role in the 13 recovery phase of a number of emergencies.

14 A. Yes, I think we might have anticipated it, but I don't

15 think we had experienced it before.

16 Q. No, that I follow, and you say there is no precedent for 17 an emergency, but the fact that there wasn't a precedent 18

for an emergency with an outcome of this scale, I think 19 you are accepting -- is this right? -- is not itself

2.0 a reason for not anticipating it and preparing for it?

21 A. No. but I think to have anticipated this particular set 2.2

of circumstances would have been quite surprising. 23 I think for a reasonable worst-case scenario planning to

2.4 have anticipated this -- and I've just, you know,

25 mentioned the words "in crisis"; people were homeless

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and in crisis following an unbelievably traumatic set of events. So I'm not denying that some of the planning would have been useful, but I think, in response to Grenfell, it's unlikely that it would have taken us to quite the situation that was being experienced.

Are you drawing a distinction in your evidence between

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- Q. Are you drawing a distinction in your evidence between reasonably anticipating mass displacement as an outcome as a result of floods in those parts of the country where they have been experienced on the one hand, and mass displacement of densely housed individuals in social housing in an urban environment on the other?
- 12 A. In part, yes. I think I'm also thinking of other
 13 previous events, such as, for example, Lakanal House,
 14 which I was not involved in and I have no recollection
 15 of myself, but my understanding there is that the local
 16 council managed that rehousing effort, at least I'm not
 17 aware of any particular issues surrounding that at the
 18 time

So I think a lot of what the department was thinking in working out how to prepare for any potential recovery lead that we might have had was a reasonably good track record of local councils actually managing their —— any local rehousing need pretty well on their own, and indeed the following week, the week following the Grenfell Tower fire, we saw Camden Council rehouse

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hundreds of people following the evacuation of the five blocks because there were fire safety issues on that Friday, the week following the fire, and there was a pan—London response, hotels were provided, people were looked after, and there was no need on that occasion for central government to get involved at all. We were aware of what was going on, but we weren't involved at

So I think there was a very strong track record, actually, of local councils being quite effective at rehousing people, both temporarily and, in the rare circumstances that were needed, permanently.

- Q. Does that answer tell us —— and tell me if I have misunderstood your evidence, Dame Melanie —— that the degree and nature of the preparation of DCLG for mass displacement following an emergency was conditioned upon the role that the local authority might play in the first instance?
- A. Well, yes, it would always be conditioned on the role that the local authority would be expected to play first. They were the ones with the housing duties, they were the first responders, and we would always have expected them to be discharging their duties, and in this case very specific duties in relation to housing

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homeless people, in fact. So I don't think it's really

that surprising that the department had not previously stepped in on a rehousing challenge like this and, therefore, was not particularly expecting that it needed to in response to Grenfell Tower. Day 285

5 I think, with the benefit of hindsight, the scale of the rehousing challenge was so immense and the trauma of 6 7 those who needed to be rehoused was so extreme that this was categorically different, in the sense that it was in 8 9 a different category of crisis, and I think we 10 recognised that quite early, actually, on the Wednesday, 11 and began to sweep in on the housing issues. And, 12 indeed, that was the one thing where the council did say 13 that they needed help, and I think they realised that 14 particularly the longer-term challenge was going to be 15 something where they needed financial support.

16 Q. Looking at the list $\,--$ and we don't need to go back to 17 it, I don't think, unless you'd like to $\,--$ the 2009 list 18 of relevant government departments for both response and 19 recovery, is it right that there was no lead government

department for fire?

21 A. Yes, that's my recollection, yes.

22 Q. Do you know why that was?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Did you ever ask that question at the time?

25 A. No.

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Q. Now, we know that in the response phase following the
 fire at Grenfell Tower, the Home Office was the lead
 government department; yes?

4 A. Yes

Q. Do you know why they were the lead governmentdepartment?

7 A. Well, my understanding is that fire was added to the
8 national risk register later, and not a fire
9 specifically in a tower block in an urban area, but in
10 a more general sense, and that the Home Office, as the
11 lead government department for fire, were given that

lead government department role for the response.

Q. So is it right that there was therefore a policy — or convention, perhaps is a better word — whereby the response would sit with the department into whose remit the event creating the emergency fell?

17 A. That seems to have been the case, yes.

18 Q. So for fire, is this right, after January 2016, that was 19 the Home Department?

20 A. Yes

Q. But before the transfer of the responsibility for fire
 to the Home Department, that would have been DCLG?

23 A. Yes, that's right

Q. And in respect of the recovery phase after Grenfell, we

 $25\,$ are told that DCLG became the lead government

3 Q. That's right, is it? 4 A. That is correct. O. Do you know when exactly -- or even not exactly, but 5 within a reasonable timeframe -- DCLG took over the role 6 7 of lead government department? 8 A. Do you mean after Grenfell itself? 9 Q. After the Grenfell Tower fire, yes. 10 A. Well, no, I don't think it's very clear, to be honest, 11 and I think there is a wider point here, that the 12 Home Office were the lead government department, but 13 I think they saw that role primarily as observing and 14 checking the blue light response, and in the early 15 ministerial meetings, it was the fire and police 16 representatives who were those who were most being 17 called upon to provide information, is my recollection. 18 I wasn't at the first two ministerial meetings, but that 19 was certainly what I was told and that's what I observed 2.0 at the later meetings. So I think the Home Office's 21 role as lead government department was seen by them as 22 fairly narrow. 2.3 I think that on the recovery side, as I was saying 2.4 earlier and as I mentioned in my witness statement, one

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department.

A. Yes.

of the first things I did on that morning was to contact

Jo Farrar and say, "We will be leading on the recovery, I believe", and I did that because Jo had been in the department for 10 months but had not, to the best of my recollection, experienced a major crisis through which DCLG would be responding, and I just wanted her to be really clear that that was my expectation.

I don't recall, though, any moment in the subsequent days where the Cabinet Office, in the form of CCS, actually said, you know, "Who is doing the recovery phase? It's you, DCLG. Please explain to us how you're doing this work". We just simply stepped into that space. And I can see, having read others' witness statements, that I think they began to turn to that recovery question really on the Saturday, that's in Katharine Hammond's witness statement, and at that point I began to have conversations with Mark Sedwill about the recovery phase and how it should look and whether or not we needed a designated Gold lead for Whitehall as a whole.

2.0 Q. Well, we will come to the events a little bit more 21 closely later on.

> Just for the moment, can you tell us, what were DCLG's responsibilities, as you understood them at the time, of DCLG as a lead government department in the recovery phase?

> > 34

A. Our role would have been to co-ordinate a wider

cross-government effort. I think that's the sort of 2 3

thing we did on the victim support side, for example. 4 And also in making sure that issues like immigration

5 issues for some of the families, all of those practical

questions like driving licences and bank accounts and 6

7 benefits payments, those were areas where the

8 Cabinet Office was leading in the first instance, but

where I would have expected quite a long tail of

10 recovery work, potentially, and that we would have been 11 in the lead in co-ordinating that.

12 I would also have expected that we would have been 13 in the lead anyway, even if someone else was leading the 14 recovery, on the housing issues, which we were.

15 Q. Would you agree -- I think you do -- that ensuring the 16 right arrangements for the recovery phase should be in 17 place already as a standing preparedness for any lead 18 government department responsible for recovery?

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20 Q. Yes.

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2.1 A. Yeah

2.2 Q. Now, if we go to your first statement, please, again, and go to page 5 $\{\text{CLG}00030653/11\}, \text{ and go up a paragraph}$ 23 2.4 to paragraph 13, you say there:

2.5 'Some elements of the Department's contribution to

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1 the response to, and recovery from, the Grenfell Tower 2 fire were therefore well rehearsed. The RED teams 3 performed their usual role, Bellwin was activated very quickly, and the Department took on the role of 5 coordinating the Central Government contribution to 6 recovery (a role it continues to have)."

> Was there any aspect which you considered was not well rehearsed?

> > (Pause)

A. I think on the housing side, we had not previously thought through what a longer—term rehousing challenge might look like on this scale, and I think the scale matters, because if it was only a few families. I don't think we would have needed to have been involved, but it was the numbers and the extreme circumstances in which those people were in that made this so difficult . And -- so we had not rehearsed before what we would do if there was a huge rehousing challenge in a very, very expensive local authority that had almost no spare social housing

And I'm not sure, to be honest, that that kind of scale of challenge is really what is anticipated by the scenarios in the national risk register either. I think that government as a whole had a presumption that the

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local authority would normally deal with that. And

nature of the outcome?

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I think we were ready, actually, although we were not

statement at paragraphs 13 and 14 here {CLG00030653/5}

you have said what was well rehearsed, and then said in

relief effort was unprecedented. So I think would this

which were not well rehearsed were the unprecedented

be fair to you: that your explanation for those elements

other respects the department's contribution to the

2 rehearsed, we were ready to respond to that housing 2 A. Yes 3 challenge and we were able to send some people to help, 3 Q. Right. 4 and we were also ready, you know, with finance, the 4 Now, to what extent in the outcome was there 5 Homes and Communities Agency stepped in to help try to 5 a difference in that lack of preparedness between, on find actual homes and to work with developers towards the one hand, Grenfell Tower being social housing and, 6 6 7 7 on the other hand, another building in the borough being So we were ready and I think we deployed quickly, 8 privately owned and full of tenants or leaseholders 8 9 but we were not rehearsed on that longer-term rehousing 9 owning their own flats? 10 10 challenge, which, as I said, I believe was A. Well, I think there is a difference, and it's a number 11 unprecedented, to the best of my knowledge and 11 of different factors that create the difference. 12 12 recollection . I mean, in the private sector, where people own their 13 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Can I just ask, did you have any 13 own homes, then there will be insurance, and people are 14 14 plans, put it that way, as to where you would go to find not looking to the government to provide them with 15 all this additional housing? 15 a long-term housing solution. I think that is one very 16 16 A No we didn't important difference SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: No one had given much thought to how 17 17 I think the other difference is that some of the 18 vou obtain it? 18 families in Grenfell Tower were there as temporary A. No, and of course the Homes and Communities Agency 19 19 accommodation, so they were already actually involved 2.0 didn't have a role in London anyway, so even if we had 20 with the council's housing department, and had 21 had a plan, it would almost certainly not have covered 21 an expectation that I think was justified that 22 London as well as it had covered other parts of England. 22 the council was going to step in and support them very, 2.3 23 I think it's -- you always have to think with very quickly. And so I think just the nature of 2.4 2.4 social housing is very different. So I think the planning as to what the scenarios are that you're 25 planning for, and I still believe that the number of 25 obligation on the authorities was different, and 37 39 1 circumstances in which a local authority can't manage 1 particularly on the local authority, and that's partly 2 this on their own are going to be very small and quite 2. a legal point in terms of temporary accommodation, but 3 exceptional. So if this had happened in -- even in 3 it's also just the nature of what families needed. another urban conurbation like Birmingham or Manchester, 4 Q. So was the thinking at the time, doing the best you can, 5 the Homes and Communities Agency I'm sure would have 5 that there was no need to include mass displacement of 6 stepped forward to talk to the council, because the HCA 6 social tenants as a result of a disaster in their 7 7 owns land, it's often developing sites, it has a very building because the response of the local council was 8 strong relationship with local developers, and offering 8 reliable enough to take up the recovery phase? 9 9 that help is something it would have been able to do. A. Well. I think the assumption was, firstly, that the 10 Should it have been doing more planning in advance 10 local authority was responsible. Secondly, that this 11 for performing that role? I'm not sure whether that 11 was an area where local government was very clear in its 12 would have helped, if I'm honest, because they had 12 responsibilities , and despite the fact that the 13 a capability, we deployed it quite quickly, and it did 13 situation at the time was very challenging, especially 14 actually make a difference, albeit that nothing was 14 in London —— and we were certainly aware that there were 15 15 really able to cope with the scale of the problem that real challenges for local authorities in finding 16 we were facing. 16 temporary accommodation that was adequate or permanent SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right. Thank you. 17 17 accommodation -- we believed that they knew what they 18 MR MILLETT: Can I just tease out a further distinction 18 had to do. And so, from that point of view, I wouldn't 19 arising from what you've just said. I mean, in your 19 have expected the department to feel that it needed to

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be looking over the shoulder of local authorities and

checking that they were dealing with certainly the

there to think about the issues, and I would have

temporary response to a housing challenge. And on

a more permanent response, you've got a bit more time

expected a local authority to come to us and say, "This

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1 is where we need help", not least because it's often 2 going to be involving financial help, which may be 3 beyond their means, which is indeed what happened, even to Kensington and Chelsea. 4

I hope that's helpful.

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- Q. It's fair to say, I think, is it, from your understanding of the civil contingencies framework, that even if a privately -owned block had suffered the same disaster as Grenfell Tower had, RBKC, assuming that it had happened in that borough, would be a category 1 responder?
- 12 A. Yes, of course, and hotel accommodation, certainly the 13 wider range of support that might be needed for people, 14 you would have expected the council to be able to 15 provide all of those things. But -- and I'm speaking 16 beyond any direct knowledge and about a scenario that 17 I'm not aware of having really happened in quite the 18 same way, but you would have -- I think when people own 19 their own properties, they have recourse to funding and 2.0 insurance that is different, and a different expectation 21 from the local $\,--\,$ of what the local authority is 22 expected to offer them, and indeed what they want to be 2.3 offered.
- 2.4 Q. So does it come to this, and maybe I'm putting it 25 a little bit bluntly, but when it came to preparedness

- for the outcome of mass displacement as a result of a fire, or perhaps structural collapse, of a tower block, DCLG's preparedness was adversely affected by an assumption, first, that if it was privately owned, the tenants were insured and could look after themselves, but if it was social housing, then the local council would take up the recovery?
- A. Well, I think that's what we would expect, yes. However, there was no mention of a fire on the national risk register of this nature at all, as far as I'm aware, even in 2016/2017, and that has subsequently been changed, and a major residential fire has been added, but that risk wasn't catered for on the national risk register. Had it been, I think the lead government department would have been the Home Office, and I don't believe that that planning for response had really been done in government.

But I also believe that my own department's assumption that the first response must be with the local authority, whether it's a private or a public-sector block, was correct, and all the history we had was that local authorities were pretty good at this, actually. They knew how to deal with temporary crises, they had resilience arrangements with other boroughs, particularly in London, that they could draw

on, and so although the circumstances of Grenfell Tower were very exceptional, I think we were right to assume that the council would step forward into the temporary rehousing effort rather better than it actually did.

Q. Let's then turn to the events themselves.

We start on 14 June.

Can we start with $\{CLG00002877\}$. If we look together at the email at the foot of the page, timed at 9.07 in the morning of that day, it comes from your office to Nicholas Holgate, copied to Jo Farrar, subject, "Fire incident", and you say:

"Dear Nick.

"I just wanted to express how shocked and sad I was to hear about the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower this

"We are ready to help however we can from Central Government — Jo Farrar from DCLG is already leading on this. Obviously today you will be dealing with the immediate response but do let us know - as and when it is helpful — if there is anything we can do."

21 Would it be correct to say that this email suggests 22 that you didn't think that RBKC would require assistance 23 from DCLG in the immediate response, at least that day?

2.4 I think my email is pretty open in offering support as 2.5 and when it is helpful, if there is anything we can do.

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- 1 Obviously the last thing you would want to do,
- 2 particularly only a few hours after a crisis like this
- 3 has first started, is to get in the way from central
- 4 government, but I think this is a pretty open-ended 5
- 6 Q. Did you think at the time that assistance from the
- 7 department would be required immediately, either in the
- 8 response phase or very early stages in the recovery 9 phase?
- 10 A. Well, I don't think I really knew at that point. It was
- 11 clear within a matter of hours, certainly by
- 12 mid-afternoon, that they were going to need some help
- 13 with the longer-term rehousing challenge, and we swept
- 14 in to support them on that actually on Wednesday evening
- 15 and certainly on Thursday, both from the department and
- 16 through the Homes and Communities Agency. But more
- widely, I don't think I knew at that point. And this 17
- 18 is, you know, 9 o'clock in the morning; my priority was
- 19 just to reach out to the council and make sure that they
- 2.0 knew we were there, and to make an offer of support and
- 21 to make contact.
- 2.2 What was it about the incident that you knew at 9.07
- 23 that morning that prompted you to offer central
- 2.4 government's assistance?
- 25 A. Well, I was aware, of course, that, you know, the

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particularly financial support.

- 9 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ Yes. The question I had was really one of impression. 10 What impression had you gained from what you knew at the 11 time which prompted you to offer central government help 12 as opposed to thinking that it's the council's 13 responsibility and they can cope without central 14 government assistance?
- 15 A. Well, simply the tower itself and the scale of the fire 16 and the damage. That was clearly going to be 17 an enormous amount of work and require, as it has done. 18 a huge amount of financial commitment to support. And, 19 you know, just the scale of that made this obviously 2.0 an enormous incident where it was unlikely that anyone 21 was going to be able to cope on its own.

I mean, at the time, I wasn't, I don't think, particularly thinking about the humanitarian support for families, which I would have seen as very much for the council to lead. So I was more -- I suspect, but to

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1 be honest, I'm really now inferring something about what

2 I was thinking five years ago, and I don't want to go

3 too far in that, or I may mislead you, but I was --

I don't think I really thought about the fact that they

5 would need help, it just seemed so obvious that they

would, given the scale of what had happened. 6

7 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: I have to say that I read -- this

8 was your first contact with Mr Holgate, was it?

9 A. Yes. it was.

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10 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes. I read it as being a not 11 entirely unconventional expression of support.

12 A. So you read it as being -

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Well, I mean, if you're going to 13 14 make contact with him, your department's responsible for 15 local government --

16 A. Yeah.

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: -- I don't find it surprising that 17 18 you should make contact in these terms, offering

19 support, without anything specific, just as a measure of 2.0 solidarity.

21 A. Just to show that I was really there, really, that we 2.2 were there. And I knew Nick Holgate a little bit, we

23 had worked together in the Treasury some years before.

2.4 I didn't know him very well, I didn't have his phone

25 number, but just as a matter of human connection, that

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1 was partly what I was trying to do. And, I mean, my 2 second paragraph starts, "We are ready to help however 3 we can from central Government".

MR MILLETT: Yes 4

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Then you go on to say:

6 " ... Jo Farrar from DCLG is already leading on 7

What was she leading on at that point?

8 9 A. So she -- as our director general for local government 10 and also as the overall director general on RED, I knew 11 Jo would be involved in thinking about the local aspects 12 of this and what was going on in North Kensington. 13 particularly not the housing issues. I mean, this is still very early in the day for us to have really worked 14

15 out what we were dealing with, to be honest, and so

16 later. Helen MacNamara — later in the day, in fact — -

17 was very clearly leading on the rehousing issues with 18 the council, but I would have expected and, indeed, my

19 conversation with Jo earlier in the day had, I think,

2.0 created an agreement amongst us that she was leading on 21

the wider issues around the local response.

22 Q. Earlier in the day; do you remember when?

2.3 A. I believe it was at around 7.00 or 7.30 in the morning

2.4 that I contacted Jo. It's in my first witness

25 statement, I believe.

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1 Q. Right, let's see. I think we can probably short—circuit 2 that question.

Can we go to {CLG00030414/5}, please. What I'm showing you, Dame Melanie, is Dr Farrar's witness statement at paragraph 20, and she says:

"I spoke by phone to Melanie Dawes at around 7.45am on my way into the Department. We discussed the fire; RED's response and involvement; MHCLG's role in supporting a locally-led recovery effort; and MHCLG's responsibilities in relation to housing and building safety. Given the location of Grenfell Tower, it was obvious that RBKC would have a key role in the relief effort. Melanie Dawes indicated that she knew Nicholas Holgate during her time at HM Treasury and would contact him to offer Government's support."

Does Dr Farrar's recollection of that telephone conversation accord with yours?

17 18 A. Yes.

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19 Q. As you have told us just now, as she says in the last 2.0 sentence, you knew Nicholas Holgate from HM Treasury,

21 your time there.

2.2 Yes, I didn't know him very well, but we had worked

23 alongside each other for a number of years, and I had

seen him once or twice since I arrived at the department

25 because of his role at RBKC, but I hadn't visited

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the council or particularly got to know them. Q. Can we then go back to the email chain, please, at {CLG00002877}. We can see Nicholas Holgate's response to you at the next email up on page 1 at 9.09: "Many thanks. Plenty of blue light resource

at present."

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Do you remember what your reaction to that was? A. I was a bit surprised. I didn't really think it was an answer to my email, to be honest. The fact that there was plenty of blue light resource didn't really seem to me to be especially relevant, to be honest, to what I thought I was offering in my previous email, which was a much more general support for the council as opposed to the blue light resource, which was clearly part of the immediate response, but was in some ways rather distinct from what the council were going to need to do. So I was a little bit surprised.

I then went into a whole morning of meetings and didn't give it much further thought until later in the

2.1 Q. Now, let's see, just moving forward into the day 2.2 a little bit more, if you can help us with a date.

> Can we go, please, to your first witness statement at page 9 {CLG00030653/9}, paragraph 23. You describe communication there with the council, and this is under

the broader heading, I think, of 14 June. I can tell you -- take it from me without scrolling up -- that this part of the statement deals with events on 14 June.

If you go five lines down from the start of the paragraph, you can see you say:

"Jo Farrar spoke to him ..."

That's Nicholas Holgate.

8 A. Yes.

9 '... at 12:30 ..."

10 A. Yes, she actually spoke to him at 12.30 on 15 June, 11 which I clarified in my second witness statement.

12 Q. Exactly, fine, so that's clear.

13 A. Yes

Q. Nonetheless, let's just read on to the end of 14 paragraph 23. You say: 15

"As confirmed by email, their initial view, based on RBKC's strong track record of service delivery and their relatively healthy financial position, was that there were no risks to flag. We thought that RBKC's partnership arrangements with Westminster Council, and the general strength of cross-borough working in London (as had been recently demonstrated during the Westminster Bridge and London Bridge terror attacks). would further enable them to cope with a disaster on

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this scale."

Did you in fact have a conversation with Jo Farrar 2 on 14 June regarding the council's ability to manage as 3 you set out here, or did that conversation take place, 4 and only take place, on 15 June?

A. I can't recall, and my apologies that I got the date

wrong when I was writing my first statement, so I did place these events on 14 June. The email that would help me to clarify that is the one that came from the local government risk teams in response to Jo's request which — and whether that was on Wednesday or Thursday. My recollection is it might have been Thursday. But what -- so that would tie some of these conversations to Thursday rather than Wednesday,

But I spoke to Jo a number of times during the Wednesday, and so I'm pretty certain we will have spoken about the council before the end of that first day once again and not just first thing in the morning.

18 Q. Just building up a little further, then, were you aware 19 that Jo Farrar had sought information from her oversight 2.0 and risk teams about whether there were any general 21 concerns about RBKC?

22 A. Yes, I was, and I think she and I discussed it before 23 she did it, and it's probably helpful just to clarify 2.4 what those teams were and what the information was that 2.5 they were giving us.

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When I arrived in the department in 2015, the Audit Commission had just been abolished, and I was very concerned that I didn't have any oversight function that allowed me to discharge my responsibilities as accounting officer, particularly for the overall financial health of the local government system, with £45 billion a year of money going through the department's own accounts.

So I set up a very small but quite focused team of about 10 or 15 people, and they held an overview, with support from the Local Government Association, of all councils on three dimensions: finance, leadership and service delivery. The service delivery element was pretty much entirely focused on children's social care and adult social care -- in other words, services for vulnerable people -- not wider services and certainly not resilience planning.

So in seeking information for those teams $--\ \mbox{from}$ those teams, what Jo and I were doing was -- and I believe I was involved in this before she did it -asking: is there a red flag? We weren't asking: can you give them a clean bill of health? We were just asking: is there anything we need to know about? And the answer was no. Kensington and Chelsea was one of the richest councils in the country, so finance was not an issue;

councils which can provide general info (facts and figures on funding, housing, TF, etc) if that's of use. The most recent development of note that I'm aware of is the break-down of the tri-borough agreement but

Now, would you agree that in the email from Alex Powell, who was the DD in local government stewardship, as you can see is the way he describes himself, there is no explicit statement that there are concerns or risks about RBKC?

13 A. That's right, he's saying they're not on our radar.

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Q. And, indeed, nothing in this email that tells you anything of the kind that you have set out in paragraph 23, which I think you attribute to this message. So it looks as if the conversation that you had was, as you say, the next day, or is that wrong? Was there a conversation about the matters at 7.45 that morning?

21 A. I'm sure there was a conversation with Jo — between me 2.2 and Jo on the Wednesday, and what I put in my witness 23 statement is a full summary of what Jo and I believed 2.4 about the council and its overall capability on the 25 basis of the information that we had, which, as I said,

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was narrow in some respects, because it was designed for But I think I was aware of this exchange on the

Wednesday. I'd be very surprised if I wasn't. So although I got the date wrong about Jo's call with Nicholas Holgate, which was on Thursday, not Wednesday, to the best of my recollection the other comments in that paragraph I think probably took place on Wednesday,

9 having seen the date of this email, which was on the 10 Wednesday

11 Q. Right, thank you. So the information at paragraph 23 of 12 your statement is something you think you got from 13 Jo Farrar during that early morning conversation?

14 A. No, I think I ...

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15 Q. Or later in the morning?

16 A. Could I just see what was in my witness statement again 17 and then I may be able to help you about when.

18 Q. Yes. Can we go back to your first statement, please. 19 paragraph 23, page 9 {CLG00030653/9}.

A. I mean, I say, "she subsequently sought information from 20 21 her local government oversight and risk teams", so 22 I think it probable, but I honestly can't remember in

23 detail, that she and I discussed it in our early morning

2.4 conversation at 7.45, and that then she sought

25 information, and I think I am correct in my recollection

that I knew she was going to seek that information, and there were no concerns flagged. And we also thought that the partnership arrangements gave them extra resilience , and although the tri-borough arrangement had broken down because Hammersmith and Fulham had pulled out, they still had that partnership arrangement with Westminster Council, and we thought that would give them extra resilience.

But I think it's important for me to say that this wasn't -- what we didn't do after this was go, "Oh, everything's fine". We were simply saying that there was no risk particularly to flag on the Wednesday that this council would not be able to cope.

14 Q. Now, about this same time, your office did receive 15 another email. I think, providing basic background on 16 the leader and the chief executive. If we go to that, 17 please, that's at {CLG00002952}.

> It's an email that comes to Alok Sharma's office from your office, I think, at 14.19, so it's about the same time as the emails that are being sent up to you from the Powell/Bliss team, as it were. Jo Farrar's team. It's copied to Helen MacNamara, subject, "background on Kensington and Chelsea council":

2.4 "Hi Donella

"This is some really basic background about

1 Kensington and Chelsea and the Departments relationship 2 with them. Kris Krasnowski can provide further 3 background if needed. 4 "Info on Kensington and Chelsea - factsheet 5 attached. "Leader [and there he is]. 6 7 "... Nicholas Paget-Brown. 8 "• His relationship with the Department is good. He 9 is well respected and open to discussing various ideas. 10 "• The general view of officials is that he is a 11 safe pair of hands who runs a tight and steady ship. 12 Has been in post since 2013. 13 " • Was part of the tri-borough system with Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster this will 14 15 officially end in 2018. 16 " • DCLG [Secretary of State] has spoken to him today 17 (there has been no readout of this call) and the 18 Minister for London is also trying to speak to him prior 19 to the meeting later this afternoon." 2.0 Then underneath that: 21 "Chief Executive. 22 "Nicholas Holgate [and there he is]. 2.3 "• Melanie has emailed and Jo has text today. 2.4 " • He confirmed that [they] have received lots of 2.5 blue light support." 57

1 Then over the page to the top of page 22 {CLG00002952/2}:

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"• Previously worked in HMT — the Department has a very good relationship with him."

Now, neither of those emails mention anything about the council's civil emergency capabilities, let alone capabilities to respond to the Grenfell Tower fire, do they?

- 9 A. No, they don't, and we had no role in assuring those 10 capabilities at the time, even through RED.
- 11 Q. Did you have any concerns by this point, in the early 12 afternoon of 14 June, about the ability of any council 13 in the country to respond to a disaster such as the 14 Grenfell Tower fire?
- 15 A. I don't recall having any concerns about this particular 16 council at that time.

Can I just be reminded of when this email was sent? 17

- 18 Q. Yes, if we go to the top of the screen we can see it, 19 probably the easiest thing for me to do, 14.19.49. So 2.0 literally --
- 21 A. Yes. I mean, it may help just to say that I was not in 2.2 the department at this point. I -- during the morning 23 and through the lunch period until about 3 o'clock,
- 2.4 I was at a number of meetings in the department which 25 particularly at the time were focused on building

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safety. I was particularly concerned about that. And

2 then I had to go to the weekly meeting of Permanent

3 Secretaries at the Cabinet Office. I then came back to

4 the department and then I went out to a meeting which

5 lasted a couple of hours and came back in at 3 o'clock. so this conversation will have been going on before 6

7 I came back, and it was really in the mid-afternoon that

8 I began to pick up the threads of what was going on and

9 I had meetings with some of my colleagues. I'm sure

10 I would have spoken to Jo again at that point,

11 I certainly spoke to Helen MacNamara, and that was when

12 I began to get a sense of what was going on and what the 13

issues were, aside from the building safety ones.

Q. Now, given the limitations of the information in the 14 15 emails that you had had so far, both the no red flags 16 email that had come to you -- making all allowances for

17 where you were on the day -- and the information, so far

18 as it is information, in this email, considering the

19 limitations of that information, why did you think that 2.0 RBKC would be able, as you say in paragraph 23 of your

21 statement {CLG00030653/9}, to cope with a disaster of

22 this scale?

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2.3 A. Well. I think for the reasons I set out in my witness 2.4 statement: that there were no flags, they had resilience

2.5 from the tri-borough arrangements, albeit that those had

been scaled back, and the wider London Resilience, and that's actually extremely important, that we had seen that in action on the terror attacks over the summer and knew it to be strong, and knew that experience in London to be very strong, and we knew the cross-borough working relationships to be effective. So all of those things gave us some confidence that the council, with help from others, would be able to cope with this.

And to this day I'm very surprised at the scale of their failure to cope, to be honest, and, you know, this is despite the fact that Nicholas Holgate and others, I know, are people who would always have tried to do everything they could in a situation like this, but their response was not adequate, and I remain surprised by that, and particularly surprised that the London Gold arrangements weren't put in more comprehensively right at the very beginning.

18 Q. Can we just then go back to paragraph 23 of your 19 statement on page 9 $\{CLG00030653/9\}$. You say there that 2.0 the partnership arrangements with Westminster Council 21 and the general strength of cross-borough working in 2.2 London would further enable them to cope with a disaster 23

> Was it your view that RBKC would be able to cope with a disaster on this scale without those partnership

1		arrangements and cross—borough working or only with	1	THE WITNESS: Thank you.
2		them?	2	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much. Would you go
3	Α.	The latter, only with them.	3	with the usher, please.
4		Can I just add that, of course, this early	4	(Pause)
5		assessment on the Wednesday turned out to be incorrect.	5	Thank you very much, Mr Millett. 11.35, please.
6		You know, we know that now, that they didn't cope. So	6	(11.21 am)
7		what I'm not saying here is that what's in paragraph 23,	7	(A short break)
8		you know, by the time we got to Thursday, was still our	8	(11.40 am)
9		view. It wasn't. We realised overnight, coming into	9	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, Dame Melanie, ready to
10		Thursday morning and particularly by Thursday afternoon,	10	carry on, I hope?
11		that there were very serious concerns, and took steps to	11	THE WITNESS: Yes, thank you.
12		address those on Friday morning. This was simply	12	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you.
13		stating to you honestly what our view was on Wednesday	13	Yes, Mr Millett.
14		afternoon about whether or not the council, with support	14	MR MILLETT: Thank you, Mr Chairman.
15		from others, would be able to manage this, and there	15	I would like to ask you about the housing
16	_	were no flags that suggested they couldn't.	16	arrangements within the DCLG.
17		Well, no flags ——	17	It's right, I think, that Sally Randall, at the time
18		At that point.	18	of the fire, was the director for housing standards and
19	Q.	— that would suggest they couldn't manage it alone or	19	support.
20		no flags that would suggest they couldn't manage it with	20	A. Yes.
21		cross—borough working?	21	Q. Yes, and I think she was made responsible —— and tell me
22	Α.	The last sentence of paragraph 23 is extremely	22	if this is wrong —— for the initial programme of
23		important. That was a very important part of our	23	building safety checks from the afternoon of 14 June.
24	_	thinking.	24	A. Yes, I believe so. That was a decision made by
25	Q.	Right. So was it your view at the time that,	25	Helen MacNamara, I believe, but I think that's correct.
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1		notwithstanding the absence of any flags, RBKC would not	1	Q. Yes, and she, I think, as director for housing standards
2		be able to cope with a disaster on this scale without	2	and support, answered to/reported to Helen MacNamara.
3		cross ——	3	A. Yes, she did.
4	Α.	I don't think any council could have coped with	4	Q. Yes.
5		a disaster on this scale on their own, and that's what	5	Now, if we go, please, to $\{CLG00002883\}$, you can see
6		the local resilience arrangements are designed to	6	here is an email from Sally Randall to "Housing
7		provide, is layers of support and resilience that can be	7	Standards & Support", it looks like a team email
8		activated to provide support.	8	address, subject, "Grenfell Tower", timed at 10.33, so
9	Q.	Now, you've told us, as indeed Dr Farrar told us	9	this is earlier in the day, and she says this:
10		yesterday, that you knew Nicholas Holgate from your time	10	"Following the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower this
11		at the Treasury, and you've said this morning not well	11	morning, teams across the Department are involved in
12		but you knew him.	12	pulling together briefing for our ministers and
13		Is it the case that you were more inclined to give	13	supporting the Resilience and Emergency Division on
14		him the benefit of the doubt or perhaps be more generous	14	their response.
15		towards his management of the response than otherwise	15	"Inevitably there's a little bit of chaos and
16		might be the case had you not known him?	16	hyperactivity in the Department this morning and some
17		No, I don't believe that's the case at all.	17	potential for duplication and confusion. To try to
18		R MILLETT: Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?	18	minimise that, could I ask that if anyone asks you for
19	SII	R MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes, all right, thank you.	19	any briefing or information, that you route through
20		Well, as you know, Dame Melanie, we have a break	20	Jane Everton, who will hold the main contact with RED.
21		during the morning, and this is a good time to take it.	21	"Thanks for all of your support already this
22		So we'll stop there. We will resume, please, at 11.35.	22	morning."
23		You know this only too well, but I have to ask you,	23	Now, would you agree with the description of the
24		please, not to talk to anyone about your evidence while	24	department at that time, that there was a little bit of

chaos and hyperactivity in the department?

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you're out of the room. All right?

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- 1 A. No, not particularly. There was a lot going on, and we 2 had a lot that we needed to do and did in the subsequent
- 3 days to put a structure around how everyone was
- 4 communicating, but no, I don't think it was chaotic or 5 hyperactive.
- Q. Now, Fiona Darby was the deputy director within 6 7 Sally Randall's division, wasn't she?
- 8 A. Yes, she was. She was one of the deputy directors, yes.
- 9 Q. Yes, and she reported to Sally Randall --
- 10 A. On homelessness, yeah.
- 11 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.\ \ensuremath{\mbox{\sc I'm}}\ \mbox{sorry, yes, and she reported to Sally Randall, and}$ 12 she was responsible for homelessness. I think, wasn't 13
- 14 A. Yes, she was
- 15 Q. Now, let's go to {RBK00048990}. This is an email from 16 Fiona Darby to Laura Johnson within RBKC, timed at 11.22 17
- 18 "Hi Laura. DCLG are briefing Ministers on this and 19 I have been asked to contact you to understand what has 2.0 been done already by K&C and what support you 21 potentially need from government. Could I call you please?" 22
- 2.3 Do you know if the department received any response 2.4 to that message?
- 25 A. No, I was unaware of this email and I don't know if

- 1 there was any response.
- 2 Q. Now, your offer of assistance to Nicholas Holgate that
- 3 we saw earlier together, at 9.07 that morning,
- 14 June -- is this right -- was the first offer of
- 5 assistance from the department to the council?
- A. I don't know if there was any offer via RED in the SCG 6 7
- earlier in the morning, but subject to that, then yes,
- 8 I think my email was the first email that went across. 9 Q. Right, and subject to that, was this the second offer of
- 10 assistance from central government, your department, to 11
- 12 A. I don't know if there were any other communications.
- 13 O Then --
- 14 A. I believe that Jo Farrar tried to text Nicholas Holgate 15 after my email exchange with him, and prior to her 16 conversation on the Thursday, but I'm not aware of any
- 17 other direct offers of help, particularly at this early 18
- 19 Q. Then let's go to {CLG00030466}. This is an email, if we 2.0 go to the top email, from Fiona Darby to Jane Everton at 21 12.16 pm on 14 June, "RE: Grenfell Tower fire:
- 2.2 Cross-govt meeting today". She says:
- 2.3 "I haven't been able to get through to anyone at K&C 2.4 and so have no information currently as to actual

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25 progress by K&C. I am still trying."

Were you aware by this point in the day, just before 2 lunchtime on the 14th, that there was a problem in 3 establishing communication with RBKC?

- 4 A. No. I wasn't aware of that.
- 5 Q. Now, just while we're on this email, we can see that she 6 goes on to say:

"In terms of re-housing - media reports say that an emergency rest centre has been set up for those that were not able to stay with family or friends.

"Assuming it is a council housing block, which it appears to be from the media reports then I would anticipate that the households will be moved from the emergency rest centre into hotels or emergency accommodation whilst the Council looks to longer term solutions."

16 Was it appropriate that the department was relying 17 on media reports for its information on what the local 18 authority was doing in the response?

19 A. Well, I think it's entirely appropriate that Fiona was 20 giving whatever information she had, and that included 21 what was in media reports, but, I mean -- I mean, 22 I hadn't seen this email before, but she's saying in the first sentence that she hasn't been able to get through 23 2.4 to anyone, and so she has no information currently as to

actual progress, and that's, you know, clearly the

- 1 context for her then giving the information that she did 2
- 3 Q. Yes. I mean, my question is perhaps better put: did the 4 fact that there were problems getting through to K&C,
- 5 necessitating reliance by the department on media
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- reports, hamper the ability of the department to obtain
- 7 reliable and up-to-date information? Was that your
- 8 recollection at the time?
- 9 A. Well, my recollection is that on Wednesday, Thursday and 10 even into the weekend, actually, the lack of information
- 11 about how those who had survived the fire were being
- 12 offered accommodation, where they had gone, how many
- 13 there were, that information was extremely hard to find.
- 14 The council didn't have it themselves. It was one of
- 15 the major problems, I think, for the Gold recovery
- 16 effort once it started, that that data collection, that
- 17 mapping, that listing of who had been offered what just
- 18 somehow wasn't functional. And that, combined with what
- 19 I think was rather a defensive approach by the council 2.0 in not really opening up to others on the Wednesday,
- 21 made our job very difficult. Yes, it did. And this is
- 2.2 one of the early signs of that, I suppose, in this
- 23 email, although I hadn't seen it before.
- 2.4 Q. I see
- 25 Did you detect at this stage that there was or might

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between the fact that the council owned the block, had refurbished it, you know, had been involved in the causes of the fire in some way, and also all the history of complaints and so on, I don't remember when those issues began to become part of the consideration.

I just can't remember. I think by the time we got to Thursday, we were definitely aware of that wider context.

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Q. At this point, do you remember thinking about or having discussions about deploying somebody either to the Town Hall to be the department's eyes and ears on the ground receiving information, or to the SCC at Lambeth?

A. No, I don't recall that, and, as I said, I wasn't
 involved in any of those discussions.

I think, with hindsight, when I look back on this, I think two things were a gap in our intelligence. One was whether or not London Gold arrangements had been mobilised. Even when they were mobilised on Thursday afternoon, that didn't come in through RED, and I think that was a gap, and something that we could have looked more for, actually, if I'm honest. I think Jo and I perhaps could have sought to find out about London Resilience on the Wednesday or the Thursday. That's my main reflection, actually, really, rather than whether or not we should have visited, as the months have gone by.

And the other gap, I think, is that there was nobody as part of the BECC arrangements, the Gold arrangements in Kensington and Chelsea, and I think we offered for there to be a point of liaison, because liaison helps the local responders, because it helps them manage what can sometimes be quite a difficult set of requests from central government, and that, as I understand it, was

refused.

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So I think those two gaps were gaps in process and in aspects of the response that meant that we were over—reliant on what was coming up through the SCG via RED.

6 Q. Did it occur to you at the time that, notwithstanding
7 the structural gaps, as you've just described,
8 nonetheless you or somebody reporting to you should have
9 got a grip and just gone down there and inserted
10 themselves into the BECC or the SCC at Lambeth, just in

order to get primary information?

12 Well, by the time it got to Thursday, particularly in 13 the afternoon, when it was clear that things were going 14 wrong, really clear that things were going wrong -15 I think it began to be clear on Thursday morning, 16 overnight, really, as the information came in -- then we 17 were thinking about that. And, of course, my own 18 Secretary of State wanted to go on Wednesday and wanted 19 to go again on Thursday, and was unable to do so for 2.0 a number of reasons, mainly because the Prime Minister's 21 visit was being arranged instead for Thursday, and 22 I think had he gone, we would have gone -- somebody 23 would have gone with him, probably Jo or Jillian Kay or 2.4 somebody like that, and we would have got a better feel

for what was going on more immediately.

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But for us to have gone, particularly on the Wednesday, it would have been very difficult. You can't just walk into a room like that when there is a command structure in place, or at least one hopes there is, that's effective. You can't just show up from central government and expect, you know, to be able to effectively interfere and challenge.

So, as I said, I think there are some bits of intelligence that we could have had, some that we would have liked to have had and weren't able to get, and I also think it's quite right that RED's role has been broadened to look for signs of stress now. Their role was quite narrow: it was to report what information there was on the ground, and they did that, and I think they discharged their duties correctly. But I think the role now needs to be slightly wider, and I think we've learnt from that through this experience, and I'm just sorry we had to learn it through this, frankly.

Q. If you go back to the email {CLG00030466}, please, and
 look at the paragraph four lines up from the bottom,
 where Fiona Darby says:

22 "In any event ..."

23 Can you see that?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. She says:

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"In any event the CE of K&C is likely to make contact with fellow CEs [chief executives] across London as they have emergency pan London protocols and agreements to support each other in these circumstances and might ask homelessness teams across London to assist with TA."

That's temporary accommodation, I think.

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"The sub—region is very close knit and it could be that the sub—region rather than pan—London might be asked to assist with emergency accommodation."

Now, you referred earlier to the tri—borough agreement and the partnership with Westminster Council, we looked at that, and here we see reference to the pan—London and sub—region being involved in the response

Was it your expectation at that point that pan—London and sub—regional arrangements would kick in, or had already kicked in?

A. Yes. I don't recall explicitly asking myself the question: have they kicked in? As I said earlier, as Permanent Secretary, I was looking across the whole range of the issues that the department was dealing with, including building safety, and so I did not specifically ask myself that question, but had I done, I would have assumed that they would have kicked in.

And I wouldn't have assumed that central government needed to make that happen, or really to check, to be honest.

Fiona Darby had joined us from a London borough, and so her description in that final two sentences is based on her direct experience of working in local government in London and, as such, you know, I think she's absolutely correct in what she would have assumed, having worked until local government, as well as what we were assuming from central government.

Q. Right. So from your recollection at the time, does this email — although you didn't receive it — tell us that the department's expectation is that Nicholas Holgate would or would be likely to make contact and ask for pan—London or mutual aid — or pan—London arrangements in dealing with a potential homelessness problem?

17 A. Yes. This is Fiona's view, she's expressing it, but it
18 would have been a shared view across the department, and
19 Fiona's direct experience would have been quite
20 authoritative in saying what she thought would have
21 happened.

Q. Did you have any reason at this point to think that
 Nicholas Holgate not only had not done that, but was not
 going to do that, but try to manage matters himself?

A. No, I had no inkling of that at this stage.

1 Q. Now, let's turn to the Secretary of State.

We looked at an email where we saw that the leader and chief executive's details were provided to your office, and a reference was made there, as you can see, to the fact that the Secretary of State had spoken with the leader of the council, Councillor Nicholas Paget—Brown. You saw that.

Day 285

Were you made aware of what was discussed between them?

A. If there was a record of it, then I think I will have
 seen it, and I do recall some conversations. I recall
 the Secretary of State's conversation with the Mayor of
 London. I don't specifically recall this one with
 Nick Paget—Brown.

Q. Do you remember whether the minister reinforced your
 message from just after 9 o'clock that morning that the
 department stood ready to provide assistance?

A. I can't immediately recall that without seeing the note of that discussion, but I would have expected the Secretary of State to offer assistance. We were very much in that mode. We were already starting to mobilise

on permanent rehousing issues, certainly by the afternoon of Wednesday.

Q. Right. Was it your understanding that the Secretary of
 State had offered assistance specifically in relation to

1 housing?

A. Well, I'm flying blind a bit here, because I'm not — I don't know if there's a record of the meeting, but what I recall is — or, rather, not of the meeting, of the conversation. What I recall is that the council, via Nick Paget—Brown, did say that they were going to need help with the permanent rehousing. I believe they also said they needed help with communications. I can't remember whether that was just — was that — whether that was Wednesday or whether it came later, but it did definitely come later. And I think that that request on the permanent rehousing came quite early, because we responded to it, actually, and were on those issues pretty early on, the permanent rehousing issues, on Wednesday afternoon and on Thursday.

Wednesday afternoon and on Thursday.
 Q. Let me just show you Sajid Javid's first witness
 statement, please. This is at {CLG10009728/10}, and
 just want to show you paragraph 39. He says:

19 "By 14:19 (and following the 12:15 briefing) I had
20 spoken to Cllr Nicholas Paget—Brown. We discussed what
21 support MHCLG could offer the Council. We were ready to
22 offer anything that the Council requested, such as help
23 with money or personnel to book emergency accommodation
24 (i.e. hotels). I was clear throughout the first

25 seven days that I didn't want money to become an issue,

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Then he goes on at 40:

"There was no request for help with emergency accommodation (i.e. rest centres and hotels)."

Did you know that? Did you know that the council had not asked for help with emergency accommodation?

A. No. But that's -- those two paragraphs are consistent with what I just said, I think, my understanding of what is likely to have been said between Nicholas Paget-Brown and Sajid Javid. In addition, I do recall that they asked for help on the permanent rehousing, and I think that that happened on the Wednesday. Perhaps it was the conversation with Alok Sharma later in the day, I don't know, but I don't think it was long before they were asking us for help on the permanent rehousing as well. But I don't recall any requests for help on the emergency accommodation either in those early few hours and days, so this is consistent with my recollection.

Q. Then let's move to what was happening in or from Number 10 at this point, which is halfway through or lunchtime-ish on 14 June.

Can we go, please, to {CLG00002946}. If we go to page 1 in this email run, bottom of the page, this is an email from Lorna Gratton, who was the

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Prime Minister's private secretary at the time, and this is an email timed at 13.54 to Louise Morgan, copied to Alastair Whitehead:

"Louise.

"We spoke about the incident at Grenfell Tower. You kindly agree to get us what you can on ...'

Then there is a list of bullet points, starting with "Building Regulations" at the foot of the screen.

Then over the page {CLG00002946/2}, please, if you look at the second set of three bullet points:

"• Re-housing efforts. I understand some of this will have already been dealt with by CCS. If that is the case please do feel free to reuse what was produced for that.

"• How is the council coping with rehousing requirement?

" • Does it need additional support from us?

"• If so, what kind of support are we able to offer.'

If we go to the top of that email chain, back to page 1 $\{CLG00002946/1\}$, please, we can see that this email comes in to your office at 14.04, so ten minutes later or so, directly to Bob Ledsome and Richard Harral, for reasons to do with the other bullet points I haven't shown you, but copied to Helen MacNamara and others, and also to the offices of Alok Sharma, who was the Minister of State, and the Secretary of State, office of Sajid Javid:

"Afternoon

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"Thanks for all your hard work on this.

"To complement the questions from Sheridan at No10, which I know you're working on, there are some questions from Lorna on the official side. I'd be grateful for answers as soon as you possibly can, and if necessary, we can send over in parts."

Were you made aware at the time yourself that Number 10 was asking these questions, particularly about rehousing efforts?

14 I don't recall seeing this specific email at the time, 15 but by the time I came back to the department later in 16 the afternoon, ves. I think I will have been made aware 17 that Number 10 were asking questions.

> If I might add, I think this also shows a certain amount of duplication that was going on in the conversations across government, because here you have Number 10, on the political and the official side, asking questions of the department and of the Secretary of State's office, while in parallel a COBR meeting is being called that doesn't involve the principals from Number 10 or anybody at Cabinet level,

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1 including the Secretary of State. So that's one of the 2 reasons why I think it would have helped to have had one

3 meeting that involved Cabinet ministers on the Monday.

I think it would have helped communication and made 5 things a bit easier for everybody to handle.

6 Q. You say on the Monday; do you mean the Wednesday?

7 A. Sorry, I meant the Wednesday. Because it was the 8 beginning, that's why my brain went to Monday.

9 Q. No. I understand.

10 Now, do you remember what action, if any, you or the 11 department took once you had come back to the department 12 later that afternoon in response, if any response, to

13 Number 10's questions about rehousing?

14 A. I don't remember anything specifically in response to 15 those questions, no, just a general sense of coming back 16 and meeting with Helen MacNamara and Sally Randall to 17 think about all of the issues on the housing side of the 18 department, which included building safety, but also the 19 issues in North Kensington.

2.0 Q. Now, you mention the ministers' meeting. It's right, 21 I think — and this is a matter of record, but just to

get your confirmation of it -- that the Cabinet Office,

23 through the CCS, arranged a ministerial meeting,

2.4 a cross-government ministerial meeting, at 1600 hours

2.5 that afternoon, 14 June; yes?

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- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. Yes. Now, you didn't attend that meeting, did you?
- 3 A. No.

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- 4 Q. I think you had another engagement to go to; yes?
- A. No, I think I was back from that engagement at around
 3.30, so I could have gone, but others went instead. It
 was a meeting at junior minister level and so, you know,
 I would never pile in as the Permanent Secretary and get
- 9 in the way of my colleagues unless I was needed.
- Q. Right. Was there any reason why you didn't clear your
 diary from the morning, not least because your
 department was or was going to be the lead government
 department on recovery in respect of this incident?
 - A. I did clear my diary. Everything apart from that one meeting over lunchtime on Wednesday was stripped out.
 I think there may have been one meeting with an external stakeholder on the Friday that remained, but everything else was cleared out.

I went ahead with the meeting at lunchtime on Wednesday. It was with all of the newly elected mayors in the combined authorities. It had originally been set up as a ministerial meeting. No ministers were able to attend, and that was partly because of the reshuffle and the general election, and I felt it was essential for me to go. It would have been extremely rude of me not to

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- go. So I went to that meeting, came back, but from that moment on, there was nothing else.
- 3 Q. So you came back, so why didn't you go to the 4 o'clock 4 meeting?
- 5 A. Well, as is quite normal, those who were closest to the
 6 work would attend in support of ministers. So I can't
 7 remember exactly who went from the department. Did
 8 Helen MacNamara go? Or was it Katherine Richardson,
 9 I think, definitely went to represent RED in particular.
 10 And I believe somebody else went too. Perhaps it was
- And I believe somebody else went too. Perhaps it was
 Steve Quartermain, because of the Building Regulations
 issues, which he was at the time still responsible for.

So I'm not sure, but my guess is that it was decided while I was out who would go, but I don't think there was any question that I would go as Permanent Secretary.

Q. Right.

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17 Now, we know the housing minister did attend.

- 18 A. Yes, and the local government minister.
- Q. Yes, that's Alok Sharma. Did he feed the relevantpoints back to you? Did he brief you afterwards?
- A. No, he didn't brief me afterwards, but I was informed of the meeting, I will have seen the actions at some point later that evening when they came round. I was in the office until about 11.00 pm, so I had many conversations

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 $25\,$ through that evening about what was going on, and

I caught up on emails as they came in.

Q. Right.

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Now, if we go to your first witness statement, please, at page 10 {CLG00030653/10}, paragraph 27 on that page, at the foot of the screen, it says this:

"The cross—government ministerial meeting agreed the following actions for the Department: to liaise with RBKC regarding the urgent provision of temporary accommodation for those displaced from Grenfell Tower (although it was clarified in the minutes that RBKC were not seeking additional assistance at this time); and to discuss with the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Devolved Administrations how best to take forward the identification of at—risk buildings and associated safety advice across the UK."

Were you made specifically aware of the need for urgent provision of temporary accommodation?

18 A. I was certainly aware of the need to support the council 19 on the housing effort, and, as I said, I think by 20 Wednesday evening we were quite focused on that. And in 21 my first witness statement, I sought to give the Inquiry 22 as much information as I could about all of what the 23 department was doing during these days, even when 2.4 I wasn't involved in it myself. I think this is a good 2.5 example of me just trying to be helpful by saying what

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had happened, because it helps the narrative and flow ofhow I was then explaining what I recalled of those days.

Q. Yes.

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Did you understand that the urgent provision of temporary accommodation for those displaced was emergency temporary accommodation in the very short term or the next stage in rehousing people affected by the fire?

- $9\,$ A. Yes, I thought it was both. It was going to need to be $10\,$ both.
- Q. How did the department resolve to act on the action
 taken away from the ministerial meeting of liaising with
 the council about temporary accommodation?
- A. I can't quite recall exactly what we did that evening, but, I mean, I know my colleagues' witness statements
- 16 will have explained that. But we -- you know, over the
- following days we, in particular, embedded support
- through Lizzie Clifford with the council to help them,
- but above all, in the end, the Gold Command structure
- 20 came in and took over those efforts eventually to put
- 21 them on to a more sustainable footing.
- $22\,$ $\,$ Q. If we turn the page in your statement, please, to
- page 11 {CLG00030653/11} and go to paragraph 31, you say at the foot of the screen:
- 25 "At 15:30 I met with Helen MacNamara and

1 Sally Randall to take stock of the implications of the was we had to set up some kind of co-ordination 2 Grenfell Tower fire for the housing side of the 2 mechanism inside the department to manage that, and that 3 Department. At this meeting it was agreed that 3 was distinct from the co-ordination and information mechanisms that RED were in charge of in terms of 4 dedicated resource would be needed to coordinate 4 activity across the housing and planning group, and 5 5 feeding information from the ground, and it was that Camilla Sheldon was appointed to lead this.' lack of a DCLG cell, response cell, and a structure 6 6 7 Now, this was half an hour before the start of the 7 around that with shift patterns and information flows 8 cross-government ministerial meeting. Was it agreed 8 and timings of meetings, that held us back, and 9 between you that a dedicated resource would be needed to 9 I mention that in my first witness statement as one of 10 10 co-ordinate activity across the housing and planning the things that was difficult in those early days. We 11 group? 11 eventually sorted it, first with a significant 12 12 A. Yes. improvement when Lise-Anne Boissiere came in on Friday 13 Q. And did you discuss immediate need for emergency 13 to sort it out, but in the end we needed support from 14 14 accommodation for those affected by the fire? CCS, which is why I was so keen to get someone seconded, 15 A. Perhaps you could show me the next -- the remainder of 15 and eventually we had Ian Whitehouse join us in the 16 16 that paragraph, and then -following week. 17 Q. Yes, of course. It says: 17 So that's very much an internal departmental 18 "We also discussed the building safety checks, the 18 resourcing issue, but what I would have expected us to 19 19 building regulations and the need to investigate any do and what we were definitely doing once we get into Thursday was logging all the actions that were coming 20 potential failures across the system." 2.0 2.1 A. Yes. So that's the best of my recollection as to what 21 from the ministerial group, any other actions that we 2.2 we discussed at that meeting. 22 were dealing with besides, and we were tracking those, Q. I mean, my question was: did you discuss the immediate 2.3 23 we were communicating, and we were trying to not 2.4 emergency accommodation needs of those affected by the 2.4 duplicate, so that people weren't colliding with each 25 2.5 other and doing the same thing. We were trying to be 85 87 A. I think we must have done, and -- you know, but whether 1 1 clear about accountabilities. Q. Let's then move on to {CLG00002995}. This is back on 2 we discussed the need for the department to take any 2 3 action in relation to it, I don't know. Probably not. 3 the topic of the interactions with RBKC, and here is Although I was writing this witness statement, you know, 4 an email from Joanna Beck at 16.37 to Fiona Darby and 5 recalling $\,\,--$ trying to recall what we had discussed in 5 Sally Randall, subject, "Grenfell": a meeting, you know, at a very, very busy time, when 6 "Hello Fiona and Sally 6 7 ${\rm "I}\,$ have managed to get hold of Altin [Smajli] who is 7 there were a lot of such conversations, so I can't be 8 8 absolutely clear that we did or didn't discuss the need the Housing Options Manager in K&C. He is not at work 9 9 today but has been keeping in touch with colleagues and to --10 Q. Do you remember --10 was about to go into work for the overnight shift. His 11 support on the temporary accommodation. 11 12 Q. No, I understand, but doing the best you can with your 12 "— TA need particularly demanding as 7-8 surrounding blocks have been evacuated and cordoned off until found 13 13 recollection, do you remember whether there was 14 an action that you decided to take forward as a result 14 to be safe. 15 15 "- They are receiving a lot of offers of support. of your discussion at this meeting about immediate 16 emergency accommodation needs? 16 RPs offering voids for use as TA, other local 17 17 A. I don't think I took forward any actions, and throughout authorities offering properties for TA etc. 18 this whole period, I was trying to give my own staff as 18 "-3 rest centres have been set up for residents, 19 much space as possible to make decisions without 19 and again a lot of offers of support from all over to 2.0 2.0 constantly having to refer back to me or for me to tell help with staffing these.

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"I asked Altin to keep us informed, including if

there is any way in which we can support them further. $\mbox{"Fiona} - \mbox{are you now doing the 5.30 meeting or am I?}$

"Thanks very much.

"Jo."

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them what those answers were.

The thing that we struggled with on Wednesday, and

particularly once we got into Thursday and Friday and

number of actions we were dealing with became clearer,

the weight of the situation became clearer and the

1 Q. I see.

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- A. And other boroughs. 2
- 3 Q. Now, then, let's look at the Mayor and the Secretary of State's role again.

 $\{CLG00003011\}$, please. Now, this is an email from the office of Sajid Javid at 18.56 on 14 June, to a wide range of recipients, including your own office and the office of Jo Farrar, and Alok Sharma and Sajid Javid, so it went right across the department, subject "[READOUT] SoS call to Sadiq Khan":

"Hi all,

"Please find a quick readout of the SoS's call with the Mayor of London below:

- ' Sadig Khan dialled in to the ministerial meeting chaired by Nick Hurd this afternoon and he was impressed with the Government's response so far.
 - "• The Mayor flagged two key points to the Sos:
- "• Rehousing both the SoS and the Mayor are very keen to ensure that we are working closely with RBKC to ensure that everyone that has been displaced by this incident is permanently relocated to homes in central London where possible, and are definitely not housed outside of London. Camilla — please can you work out what support we can offer RBKC on this?"

Was anything done, do you know, following that 90

request?

2 A. Yes, I'm sure it was. I think that will have been

3 followed up probably mainly on the Thursday, given that

4 it was already approaching 7 o'clock in the evening, but

5 I don't know exactly what was followed up. But that's

very consistent with the general conversation at the 6

7 time, of beginning increasingly to worry about

8 supporting the council on rehousing.

9 Q. Right.

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10 Now, there is no need to go to it, but at 11 paragraph 24 of your statement at page 9

12 $\{CLG00030653/9\}$ —— I think we saw this —— you were made

aware that the Minister for Housing and Planning,

14 Alok Sharma, had spoken to Nicholas Paget-Brown on the

15 evening of 14 June, and Mr Paget-Brown had reported

16 progress on rest centres and accommodation and had 17

flagged challenges that the council would face in 18

providing permanent rehousing. That's what you say in 19

paragraph 24. I've summarised it for you, but is

20 that -

2.1 A. I'm sorry, could I see that paragraph? It would be --

22 Q. Of course. Of course. It's page 9 of your first

statement {CLG00030653/9}, paragraph 24. 23

- 2.4
- 25 Essentially --

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- 1 A Yes
- Q. $\,--$ I repeated it to you verbatim. 2.
- 3 A. No, that's fine. The sentence about providing permanent 4 rehousing --
- 5 Q. Yes
- 6 A. -- that sentence, plus the mention of permanent
- 7 rehousing by the Mayor in conversation with the
- 8 Secretary of State, are both consistent with what I was
- 9 saving to you earlier, which is that I believe the
- 10 department was getting pretty focused on the permanent
- 11 rehousing challenge as early as Wednesday evening, and
- 12 that's some of the work that we did later through the
- 13 Homes and Communities Agency to try to find
- 14 accommodation and so on. So that was I think the thing
- 15 that we were, you know, really picking up the baton on
- 16 once we got to this stage in the response.
- 17 Q. So that's a longer-term recovery question.
- 18 A. It is, and the word "permanent" is there in both those
- 19 conversations, and that's my recollection, as I was
- 2.0 saying earlier, that that was a main focus for us,
- 21 rather than the temporary accommodation. It was the
- 2.2 permanent accommodation that was going to be so
- 23 difficult because, fundamentally, this is one of the 2.4
- most expensive housing markets in the country and there 25

just wasn't very much social housing available, so it

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1 was going to need a huge effort to try to find 2 accommodation for the families.

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- 3 Q. Just focusing a little bit more on perhaps the first 4 part of that answer, did you regard the emergency need 5 for temporary accommodation as part of the recovery or part of the response? 6
- A. I don't know. I think —— I didn't think at the time about that distinction, but my personal view is that the distinction between recovery and response is -- does not 10 help sometimes when you're actually faced with an actual emergency and need to think about the issues that vou're facing. So, as I said to you earlier, nobody ever said to us, "You are responsible for recovery, please get on with it". We did it anyway. But neither do I think it was clear what the response issues were and what the recovery issues were. The lead government department, the Home Office, didn't really get involved in any of this, and I think that, in practice, issues like rehousing are on a continuum, and the recovery needs to start right from the beginning. And in a way, does it 21 matter whether or not temporary accommodation is part of recovery and response? The important thing is that it's dealt with.

So I think it was clear that it was for the local responder and the local authority, and I personally

- think it's clear that they should always be in the lead, central government can't add a lot to the real emergency response, but I think the Cabinet Office, in particular, perhaps with my former department, needs to do some thinking about this, because this difference between response and recovery was not clear and I think it got in the way a bit.
- Q. Yes, and does that tell us that -- well, let me ask it differently: at the time, did you think or ask yourself or anybody else: what is the Home Office, as the lead government department for the response, doing about emergency temporary accommodation?
- A. I didn't ask myself that question, but, had I answered it, I would have said they weren't doing anything. I wouldn't really have expected them to do anything, to be honest, I would have expected them to look to us to talk to the council about what was going on, and that is what happened. I think it's a very good example of how their role as lead in response wasn't really one that I thought really made sense in the response to Grenfell, to be honest
- 2.2 Q. And did you think at the time that, notwithstanding that 23 DCLG was not the lead government department for the 2.4 response, nonetheless it should act as if it were so far 25 as emergency temporary accommodation was concerned?

A. I think my demeanour and that of my Secretary of State and of all my colleagues was just to lean in to whatever needed doing. So we weren't thinking about response or recovery, and the planning hadn't been done on either response or recovery, really, in my opinion, and so there was nothing really for us to be drawing on, and the Home Office weren't really drawing on anything either. So what we did was simply try to manage and to listen, to deal with whatever information we had, and to do whatever we could to help. That was our overall approach and demeanour.

12 But a bit more advanced planning and preparation 13 would have helped us. There's no question in my mind 14 about that

- 15 Q. Yes, and would you agree that advanced planning and 16 preparation, the need for that would have been more 17 obvious to each of the government departments if their 18 roles in the response had been more clearly delineated?
- 19 Yes. I think for me there are two dimensions to this. 20 One is the dimension of response versus recovery, 21 whereas I think -- where I think there is a natural 22 assumption that response is what matters in the first 23 few days and recovery kicks in later, which is why 2.4 I think the recovery planning is not really expected of

DCLG or any other department in the same way as it is 95

expected for a lead government department for response, because the recovery issues generally present themselves as the crisis unfolds, and so you have time to pick them up, and I think that's just not really very helpful. I think, in practice, the recovery thinking needs to be planned for and needs to be thought about explicitly and tasked by the Cabinet Office at the beginning. Now, it may be that at the start you say there isn't going to be a central government role in recovery, and it may be that, as the days go by, that judgement changes and you have to switch something on. But I believe there should be a more explicit consideration of recovery issues and a lot more preparation further in advance. That's one dimension.

I think the other dimension is about the actual issues and the outcomes and the problems we were dealing with. The Home Office was the lead government department just because it was a fire, but the Home Office didn't really have anything to do and, indeed, they didn't really do very much. There were some extremely hardworking officials who came to every meeting, they were the people from fire and police, but it was the emergency services themselves who were doing all the -- who were answering all the questions in the COBR meetings and who were really the ones who were

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Opus 2 Official Court Reporters feeding in to the cross-ministerial discussions. So I think it was just wrong to assume that the Home Office was going to be able to cover off all the response issues in relation to a crisis like this. We should have been much more involved, and perhaps prior to the moving of fire across to the Home Office in 2016, it would have been -- the department would have been more joined up, although there was not a fire on the national risk register at that point.

10 Q. Thank you.

May 26, 2022

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Now, let's then go to page 12 of your first statement {CLG00030653/12}, please, paragraph 34, "End of day 1". You say you remained in the office until around 23.00, and then you say this:

"I spoke to Sir Jeremy Heywood (Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service) in the early evening to update him on the situation. I also spoke to Sir Philip Rutnam, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Much of my focus that evening was to ensure that there was a full inquiry into what had happened and why, including how the fire had spread and the links to building regulations."

2.3 Then you go on there.

Did you discuss the Building Regulations?

A. With Jeremy Heywood or with Philip Rutnam?

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1 Q. With Jeremy Heywood.

- 2 A. Yes. I believe did. I can't remember exactly what 3 aspect of it, but I think we must have discussed it, because it was such a bit issue, and indeed was a lot of 5 what we were concerned about in thinking that an inquiry 6 was needed.
- 7 Q. Right, and did you discuss what then became the Building Safety Programme? 8
- 9 A. Yes. We didn't know very much at that point, of course. 10 but I will have discussed with Jeremy what I knew, and 11 he, I'm sure, would have asked me a lot of very good 12 questions, because that's what he always did.
- 13 Q. Can we take it from these discussions late on the evening of 14 June that there was real concern within 14 15 the department about the department's own actions in
- 16 response to Lakanal? 17 A. Yes, there was real concern, and most of us, as you 18 know, certainly me and Helen MacNamara and my ministers, 19 were new to these issues, had been unaware of them,
- 2.0 and -- as I explained in my previous evidence to 21 the Inquiry, and we were grappling with this, trying to
- 2.2 make sense of it, trying to gather the information, and 23 we were deeply worried, even at this stage. We were to
- 2.4 become even more worried as the days unfolded. But that
- 25 was a lot of what I was worried about this evening, this

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particular evening, and the need to have a full 2 investigation of what had happened.

- 3 Q. Were your concerns in relation to this topic something 4 that perhaps diluted the attention that the department 5 was giving to the immediate response or the immediate early stages of the recovery in the aftermath of the 6
- 7 Grenfell Tower fire? A. No, I don't think it's fair to say that it was diluted. 8 9 I think on that Wednesday evening, we didn't have the 10 information that we had on Thursday morning and 11 throughout that second day on the failure of the local 12 authority's response, and, as I said earlier. I think. 13 you know, there is a question for me as to why those
- 14 issues weren't aired in the SCG meetings. We were 15
- finding out things by talking directly to the council 16 when we were able to that weren't coming up through the
- 17 SCG, so I think there's something about why that wasn't
- 18 in the SCG conversation, but it wasn't, and therefore we 19 weren't getting that through the normal RED channels.
- The council wouldn't really engage on that first day. 2.0
- 21 I wish we had checked what London Resilience were up to
- 22 and what they thought, because I think that would have
- 23 been a very good conversation on the Wednesdav. with
- 2.4 John Barradell or Eleanor Kelly or others, but we didn't

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1 But I don't think it was about the building safety 2. issues dominating.

3 Q. Right.

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- A. I was trying to manage effectively two crises, yes, and 5 so was my Secretary of State, but I did have Jo Farrar 6 on the local issues and Helen MacNamara on the housing 7 issues, and the department, I believe, you know, mobilised pretty effectively in response to both those 8 9 things.
- 10 Q. Did you discuss what was done by Southwark in the 11 immediate aftermath of the Lakanal House fire to see 12 whether any good practices commended themselves to be 13 adopted in the aftermath of this fire?
- 14 A. I don't particularly recall that, no.

15 Q. No.

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Let's then turn to the next day, 15 June, and let's start at {HOM00044761}, bearing in mind the conversation that you'd had in the late evening of the 14th that we've just been through.

This is an email from Philip Rutnam to the Home Office Permanent Secretary and others in the Home Department, "Update", "NOT FOR ONWARD DISTRIBUTION", at 7.03 in the morning, and he says:

"I think I'll leave speaking to Melanie, thanks.

25 I am off to Manchester ..."

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Then in the last paragraph he says:

"I am worried for the sake of the Government as a whole about what will happen if CLG do start taking the lead. On the basis of yesterday there is a real risk they will comprehensively mess it up. Both SoS and Perm Sec seemed, frankly, to be at risk of panicking. I know that we think more of this issue is likely to shift to CLG in time given the building standards issue but I think No10 should consider the need for a single, calm lead across Govt."

Do you know what might have given Sir Philip Rutnam

cause to harbour those concerns he expresses there?

A. I think it was the conversation I had with him on the Wednesday evening, which was referred to in the excerpt from my witness statement which you showed me a moment ago, and that conversation was about the public inquiry, and as I've said elsewhere in my statements, we believed that we needed a public inquiry, we believed it needed to be set up as quickly as possible. I had discussed that with Sue Gray at the Cabinet Office. It was part of my conversation with Jeremy Heywood. Philip was of the view that this would not be a good idea, and that's

a public inquiry was needed.

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what I think he means by me and my Secretary of State

panicking, that we were panicking by believing that

1 Q. Were you? Were you at risk of panicking?

A. I don't think we were panicking, no, and I — a week or so after the fire, I think everybody was looking at our leadership of this, which is I think what we did, alongside the Cabinet Office and Number 10, and was actually rather glad that we'd been in charge.

7 Q. Was it you who came up with the idea of instituting this 8 Inquiry?

9 A. No. it wasn't me. I think it was Helen MacNamara 10 mostly, alongside the Secretary of State. I was fully 11 in support of them, as was Jeremy Heywood and Sue Gray, 12 and the Prime Minister announced it the next morning. 13 But we had sent an email that evening at about 10.30, 14 I believe, via, I think, James Nation in the 15 Secretary of State's office to Number 10 on some of the 16 wider questions, and we had intended that email to be 17 agreed with the Home Office, but they had gone by the 18 time we were ready to send it, and we'd discussed 19 earlier drafts with them. And I think it -- although, actually, it's quite nuanced about the need for

actually, it's quite nuanced about the need for
 an inquiry, because we knew their position, I think they

were still pretty cross about it, because they had quite strong views.

Q. Let's then go to a little bit later on the same morning,
 15 June, {CLG10009750}. It's from Sir Jeremy Heywood to

you on 15 June at 9.12, subject, "Fire":

2 "Lots of concern here that the LA is not gripping $3 \qquad \qquad \text{the aftermath} - \text{re-housing etc.}$

"Is that fair?

"Should CLG second in some people to help?

"Which of your Ministers is now gripping this tightly?"

Now, if you go to your first statement, please, at page 14 {CLG00030653/14}, if we can go to that, you can see what you say at paragraph 41 about this email. You say that you replied to him at the end of the day with an update:

"... and I also made sure that Jo Farrar was aware of his email before her visit to Kensington and Chelsea the following day."

16 Is that right?

17 A. Yes

18 Q. Why did you wait until the end of the day, 15 June, to 19 respond to Sir Jeremy?

A. Well, there was a lot going on that day, and I —
 you know, I had a good working relationship with
 Jeremy Heywood, and I knew he didn't need me to go back

23 straight away. What I believe happened is that his

concerns were circulated around. I know I saw his email

25 straight away; I would always have seen an email from

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1 Jeremy and, if I'd missed it, my office would have

2 brought it to my attention. So his concerns, alongside

those of Nick Hurd and others, were definitely part of

 $4 \hspace{10mm} \hbox{the thinking and the gathering concern that was,} \\$

5 you know, beginning on Thursday, and then when the

6 Prime Minister visited, I think those were even more

7 acutely felt and seen and heard because we were

7 acutely felt and seen and heard, because we were 8 actually on the ground with quite large numbers of

9 people from central government that afternoon.

Q. When you received his email, did you share his concerns,did you recognise them, or did they come as a surprise

12 to you?

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13 A. This was quite early for us to be hearing those

concerns, and so I don't think -- I think his email was

probably one of the first that I saw that began to

16 express those concerns. And ——

17 Q. Did you —— sorry.

18 A. Sorry, yes, that's fine, I'll finish there.

 $\begin{array}{ll} 19 & \text{Q. Why didn't you go back to him, either immediately or} \\ 20 & \text{shortly afterwards, and ask him what he meant and what} \end{array}$

21 the problem was?

22 A. Well, I thought the most important thing was to hear the

23 concerns and to take them into the thinking, and we had

a meeting with the Secretary of State at 9.30, and \dots

you know, that didn't conclude actions more broadly on

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1 the response, but it did include getting confirmation on 2 the housing situation in particular, which was one of 3 the concerns that Jeremy had raised, and essentially 4 what I think I did was to take Jeremy's concerns into that meeting and into subsequent meetings inside the 5 department as one of several bits of information that we 6 7 were getting that there was a problem, and then the 8 cross-ministerial meeting later that afternoon was the 9 place where that really crystallised . 10 Q. Yes, but my question is a bit more prior to that. Why

Q. Yes, but my question is a bit more prior to that. Why didn't you get on to him by email in response and say, "What do you mean? What exactly is the problem?"

A. Well, I don't think I needed to. I think he was being quite clear, actually, that there were problems with rehousing, and we were hearing that from others as well. So, you know, I don't know, really. I, you know, had an immediate meeting to go to, but I felt the important thing was to pick up the worries and to try to deal with them and to try to validate the information. As I say, it was one amongst several emails and bits of intelligence that were coming in, because some ministers had been on the ground as well.

Q. Yes. Well, let's look at exactly that. This may be
 another example, or an example: {HOM00046090}. If we
 go, please, to the foot of the page, here is an email

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from the fire minister's private secretary to Sajid Javid's office:

"James,

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"Thanks so much for your time on the phone."

Sorry, it was at 8.45 that morning, I should point out to you, 15 June:

"As promised, here are the points we covered:

" \blacksquare If No 10 would like the parliamentary session to be a joint HO/DCLG event then we're planning for it to be at 13:30"

Second bullet point:

"The Minister has been told that there is an urgent [underlined] issue with access to cash for former residents of Grenfell Tower. He's also been told via Margot James MP (BEIS Minister) that the Post Office — there is local one just around the corner from the tower, have offered to facilitate access to money for residents. He would be really grateful if your teams were able to facilitate a link between the Post Office and the local Council so that they can make people

Then this, third bullet point:

"There have also been a couple of concerns raised with him about the quality of the sleeping materials that were available for people last night and asked if

there was anything HMG could do to help the Council upgrade?"

Day 285

Were you made aware of any of these concerns being relayed by Nicholas Hurd's office on that morning?

5 A. I was aware that Nicholas Hurd had had some concerns
6 when he'd visited. I can't remember when I became aware
7 of that. It's possible that it was at the 9.30 meeting
8 with the Secretary of State, because every time the
9 Secretary of State picked up anything of concern, he was
10 on it straight away and asking us to investigate it.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. I wouldn't have felt I needed to investigate it myself,
 13 but I was certainly confident that those dynamics were
 14 working through the department.

15 And then the other time I might have been made aware 16 of this was at 1.30 when I chaired a stock-take across 17 the department to try to pull together all the different 18 issues we were grappling with, and where I was 19 describing earlier, it was the first such stock-take 2.0 meeting, really, and there again I suspect some of these 21 questions were raised. I can't remember exactly what we 22 did in response or who followed it up, but when 23 a minister raises something like this, civil servants 2.4 will act on it

Q. Then let's go to $\{CAB00005941\}$. This is at 9.15 on the

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same morning, so half an hour afterwards. Here comes an email from Alastair Whitehead to Lorna Gratton internally , and the second email down says:

"Can you get a debrief from Peter [Hill, I think] on what needs to happen today — in short seems to be a mess in terms of rehousing and coordination for the families affected and we need to send DCLG teams down there to help."

9 Were you aware that Number 10 had concerns about the 10 response on the ground that morning?

A. I was aware on the basis of the email from
 Jeremy Heywood, and I was aware of the conversation
 between the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.
 I mean, when Alastair Whitehead says, "in short

I mean, when Alastair Whitehead says, "in short seems to be a mess in terms of rehousing and coordination", that seems to me, with what I know now, to be accurate.

18 Q. Did you know it at the time?

A. No, I think that is put more strongly than we knew at the time, and we didn't see that email; at least I didn't see it. But I think — look, honestly, I think it took us, you know, quite a long time on Thursday to

23 realise the scale of that problem. We were relying on

the information that was coming up through the SCG,

25 where these issues weren't being raised . We --

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the council didn't want us coming to their meetings. We offered to have somebody in those meetings and that offer was refused, as I understand it. And, you know, that's the day when I think, in an ideal world. Jo Farrar or I would have perhaps called London Resilience, actually. If I had to think of one action that I think we could have done on that day that might have made a difference, that's the one, rather than visiting, which would also have been good, but I think would have been very difficult to arrange, in practice.

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Can I say one more thing, which is when you get lots and lots of bits of information like this coming in from lots of different places, it's quite hard to validate them quickly, because you do need to go and find out what's going on. But we had RED there, but the information sources RED had were not really confirming this, and we weren't able to get into the local authority, which is the place where I think we would have seen that there was a problem. That's why I go to London Resilience being the place that I think we could have and should have turned to, to go, "What's going on, you know, this is just so odd, why is it that the response seems to be going so badly?" And then maybe we would have got there a bit earlier in the day on Thursday, rather than on Friday morning.

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So it's a question of, I don't know, 12 to 15 hours that we might have been able to have just got there a bit sooner, maybe a little bit longer, but probably not much more than that.

5 Q. If we go to the top email on the page, 6 Alastair Whitehead to Lorna Gratton in response 7 two minutes later:

> "PM speaking to Sajid directly now — essentially making that point and asking what we can do to support RBKC.

Now, you cover this at paragraph 40 of your first statement on page 14 $\{CLG00030653/14\}$, if we can go to it, and you refer to this email traffic and you provide a read—out there of the call, and you say a response was sent just before 15.00. Why is that? Why was it not sent before that?

- A. Well, I think it was quite a long request with quite a tight deadline on exactly what the department's role was, what was going on, and I think it took a while for 2.0 that information to be collated.
- 21 Q. Because I think it's right, isn't it, that the 2.2 Secretary of State's APS, assistant private secretary, 23 had actually asked for a response by 2.00 pm?

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- 2.4 A. Yes
- 25 Q. Yes.

1 A. It strikes me when I look at that request that it was 2 quite a big one for such a tight deadline, if I'm

4 Q. Let's look at what you sent back. {CLG00003194}. Here's the note. It's a one-page document confirming 5 the function of RED and what RED had been doing, and I'm 6 7 summarising very briefly, but that's right, isn't it?

A. Well, towards the end it talks more about DCLG's support 8 9 on funding, for example. I think we'd mobilised Bellwin 10 by Thursday morning, or at least had agreed with 11 the council that we were mobilising it.

12 Q. Yes.

13 A. And also that we were discussing the provision of emergency accommodation. But, yes, I think this is 14 15 a rather RED-centred response, and I think that this 16 document — this request was actioned to RED, and, to be 17 honest. I would have expected a slightly broader 18 response. I think it's a bit narrow and doesn't really 19 relate to the breadth of the issues that the department 20 was dealing with in terms of the emergency response. 21 Q. Yes. I mean, at risk of pedantry, it also doesn't refer

22 to the building correctly, does it? 2.3 A. No, it doesn't, and I find that, as I see it throughout

2.4 the documents, you know, very jarring, and I just -- I'm 25 sure that those directly involved in the fire must find

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1 it potentially quite offensive and very difficult , and 2 I'm very sorry about that. It just is an oversight

3 which I can't really explain, because I know I was

calling it Grenfell Tower right from the very beginning 5 on Wednesday, so I don't know how it came to be that 6

Grenfell House was used for so long. 7 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ Does it tell us anything about the degree of engagement 8 of your officials?

9 No, I don't think so, but — no, I don't think it does, 10 but it perhaps speaks to a certain level of stretch that 11 was going on in the teams. This doesn't look to me like

12 it's a note that's had a very great deal of senior 13

oversight or checking, and, you know, it goes to what 14 I was saying earlier, that I think -- and what's in my

15 witness statement, that I think RED mobilised to do the 16 job that RED was supposed to do, but what the department

17 was not really ready for was the job that the department

18 was supposed to do on the areas of our responsibility, 19 including housing, but also a wider role in recovery.

2.0 We were not prepared for that, and we did not have the 21 structures within the department to be able to action

2.2 and deal with requests properly, and I think this is 23

a symptom of that. 2.4

I would also say, though, that, you know, it isn't 25 always helpful in situations like this when the centre

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Opus 2

- 1 asks for a note on something, when you're actually 2 trying to deal in real time with the issues. So it's 3 a rather clunky way of asking for information, and 4 I think what came back was a rather clunky and not 5 particularly impressive response. Q. If we look at the fifth paragraph down under 6 7 "Grenfell House Activity", which starts: 8 "The whole local authority ..." 9 Do you see the paragraph there, in the centre of the 10 screen? 11 A. Yes 12 Q. It says: 13 "The whole local authority is involved in the 14 response alongside key partners, organised in line with 15 their emergency response protocol. An offer was made for DCLG staff to attend RBKC offices; this was not felt 16
 - Do you know why that was the case?

to be useful."

- A. No. Just to be clear, my understanding is that this was
 an offer made by DCLG for our staff to attend and it was
 refused by the local authorities. When I first saw this
 document, I thought it was the other way round, but
 I think it is that we made the offer to them.
- 24 Q Yes

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25 A. I don't know why they refused it. I think they were

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very defensive, really almost from the very beginning,

- 2 and were unable to see, really, quite how much help they 3 needed, and I think that they were particularly defensive about central government coming along and 5 telling them what to do and getting involved. 6 Q. Now, can we go then to CAB000 -7 A. Could I just add, what's missing from this note is any 8 mention of whether or not the London Resilience 9 arrangements have been engaged, and for me, that is 10 a gap in the way we were thinking about this, that we 11
 - weren't looking to see whether that had happened. We were relying on it, but we weren't looking to see whether it had happened, and I think that's one of the big gaps that I feel Jo and I and others didn't fill in those early days, is checking that those arrangements were there, and you can see that in this note, it wasn't part of the conversation.
- 18 Q. Right.
- A. And they weren't invited to the Wednesday afternoonmeeting of ministers either.
- Q. Now, looking back on the conversation you had at 9.30
 that morning with the Secretary of State, and also on
 the email we saw earlier from Jo Beck about rehousing,
 did the subject of Nicholas Holgate potentially reaching
 out to the pan—London arrangements, at least so far as

1 rehousing was concerned, come up during that 2 conversation?

- 3 A. I don't think so, no.
- 4 Q. Can you explain why that is?
- A. Well, as I said, I think it was a gap in our thinking
 that we should really have been thinking more, and
 I think RED should have thought about it, I think Jo and
 I should have thought about whether or not
- 9 London Gold were involved in the way that we would have
- 10 expected was necessary given the scale of this
- 11 emergency.
- Q. Now, can we go, then, to {CAB00014859}. We've already touched on the conversation between the Prime Minister and Sajid Javid on that morning. Here is a read—out of that at 9.29 from Lorna Gratton internally. You're not on it, but let me just show you parts of it. The timing is, I would assume, just before your meeting with the
 Secretary of State, which you said took place at 9.30 —
- 19 A. Yes

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20 Q. -- so one minute later:

21 "The PM spoke to the Communities Secretary on the 22 topic of the Grenfell Tower fire. The PM noted that 23 commentary in the media this morning reported that the 24 operation to look after the victims was less than well 25 organised. The PM asked what Sajid knew about this and

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1 what further we can do to support K&C (who are leading 2 the effort).

"Sajid said he had no reports for it being disorganised. CLG stood up emergency response within a couple of hours and had called K&C leader and the Mayor — both indicated that they had what they needed. The Mayor had urged CLG to focus on rehousing — and that it should be very local. Sajid agreed with that, and said that the Government would provide funding to facilitate this if necessary. They had agreed that when the emergency has settled down, they would further discuss the necessary recovery efforts. Sadiq and Nicholas (K&C leader) had both been told they should call Sajid directly if they need anything (i.e. not go through officials if that delayed things). CLG team are still on the ground at the site."

Now, can you account for the Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, having no reports for it being disorganised, as he says, or as is said of him?

20 A. I think that is the information that we had on the Use Mednesday night and at the start of Thursday morning.

22 We didn't have reports of it being disorganised. We ——

23 he had spoken to the leader and the Mayor, Alok Sharma

 $24\,$ had also spoken to the leader, and we were not getting

 $25\,$ through those channels or through RED channels any of

- $1 \qquad \quad \text{the reports that began to emerge on Thursday morning}.$
- So I read this email -- and I've not -- this is
- $3\,$ $\,$ $\,$ Number 10's record of that conversation, I had not seen
- 4 it before.

Q. No. of course.

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- 6 A. But in what Sajid Javid is saying in that second
- 7 paragraph, that seems to me to be a faithful description
- 8 of what the department thought was going on on Wednesday
- 9 night, and it was on Thursday morning that that began to
- 10 change.
- 11 Q. I mean, we've seen the email from Sir Jeremy Heywood to 12 you about the reports coming to him that RBKC was not
- gripping this tightly.
- 14 A. Yes

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- 15 Q. Are you able to explain why the Secretary of State did
- not know that when speaking to the Prime Minister
 - a little bit later -- not much later, but a little bit
- 18 later that morning?
- 19 A. I don't know when the conversation was between the
- Secretary of State and the Prime Minister and whether itcame after my email from Jeremy Heywood.
- Q. Before, 9.10, about 9.10, and then this is the read—out
- from it, just before your meeting with the
- Secretary of State. But we also saw the email from
- 25 earlier that morning from Sir Jeremy to you, telling you

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- 1 about RBKC not getting a grip.
- 2 So would you accept that there appears to have been
 - some kind of breakdown in the communication line between Number 10, the Cabinet Office and your department about
- 5 what was actually happening on the ground?
- 6 A. No, I don't think it was a breakdown of communication.
- 7 I think that Number 10 -- and I'm not sure from quite
- 8 which sources, but Number 10 were very clear, and I'm
- 9 sure Jeremy Heywood will have been talking to the
- Prime Minister about this and probably part of the early
- 11 morning meetings in Number 10 on that Thursday morning.
- They were very consistent in their concerns. Jeremy
 emailed me about them and the Prime Minister raised them
- directly with the Secretary of State. I didn't, as far
- 14 directly with the Secretary of State. I didn't, as fa
- $15\,$ as I recall , forward that email to the Secretary of
- State, but -- at least not before his meeting with the Prime Minister. But I don't think there was a breakdown
- 18 of communication; I think they communicated very clearly
- to us something which we were not aware of at the time.
- 20 But we were becoming aware of it quite quickly.
- 2.1 Q Yes In fact it's the case isn't it that at t
- 21 Q. Yes. In fact, it's the case, isn't it, that at this 22 point, the DCLG had not contributed anything to the
- response on the ground beyond offering help, which had
- 24 been refused?
- 25 A. I think the team that Sajid Javid is referring to there

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1 is the RED team.

- 2 Q. Right, I see.
- 3 A. And that was there.
- 4 Q. Right.

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Now, if we go, please, to {CAB00006264}, we move forward in time. I think you have already covered this to some extent, but here is an email from Lorna Gratton to Alastair Whitehead at 17.32 that day about further

help:
"We've asked them to look into further support (e.g.

secondees) would be welcome from the LA."

As you told us, that did happen, but not until some days later, I think: Lizzie Clifford to Westminster and Fiona Darby on 17 and 18 June respectively.

15 A. In response to questions from the Inquiry, I provided

- a full list of all those seconded in my second witness
 - statement. I believe that Lizzie Clifford and
- Fiona Darby started working with the council on the
- Thursday, but not actually in the council buildings.
- But they began to work with them, I believe, on the
- Thursday afternoon.
- 22 Q. Now, coming back to the morning of that day, let's go to
- $\{CLG00003084\}$. This is an email from your office to
- Nicholas Holgate. "Call with Melanie Dawes at DCLG" is
- 25 the subject, and the diary manager writes to

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- 1 Nicholas Holgate and says:
- 2 "Melanie has asked if you might be available later
 3 this morning to speak?

4 "Melanie is currently in a meeting with the

- 5 Secretary of State that is due to finish around 10:15."
- 6 That's the meeting that started at 9.30, I think, is
- 7 it?
- 8 A. Yes
- 9 Q. Did you get a response to this?
- 10 A. I don't think so, no.
- 11 Q. Were you concerned that your office was unable to
- 12 arrange this call?
- 13 A. Yes, and Jo Farrar spoke to Nicholas a little bit later
- $14\,$ $\,$ on that morning, finally . That was the first time that
- either of us had spoken to him.
- 16 Q. Right. What had prompted your desire to speak to him?
- 17 A. The concerns about what was going on on the ground.
- 18 Q. That had come to --
- 19 A. That must have been part of it, and also just a general
- $20\,$ feeling that it was appropriate for me to speak to the
- 21 local authority lead, and he hadn't been in contact the
- 22 previous day. So I think in any circumstances I would
- have wanted to have a chat with him that morning, but
- $24\,$ particularly given the concerns, I think it was

25 essential.

- Q. Then chronologically the next thing I think is at {CLG00003102}, 10.36 that morning, 15 June. This is a note to self, essentially, second email down, at 10.36, "RBKC update from Jo". That's Jo Farrar, and there are four bullet points:

 "• There was a quick responses [sic] in terms of
 - "• There was a quick responses [sic] in terms of providing temporary accommodation last night.
 - " The task for today and tomorrow is finding more permanent homes.
 - "• Our team is in contact with the Director of Housing who is holding a meeting and will report back after 11am.
 - "• There is a strategic co—ordinating group at 11am where this will be discussed. Our staff are on this group."

Now, in relation to the first three of those, temporary accommodation, more permanent homes, did that reflect the concerns that you had or had heard that morning?

- A. I don't quite know where Jo's update had come from or
 what she was particularly aiming to inform me of that
 I wasn't already aware of, but I think those first two
 bullets are consistent with where we were on the
- help on temporary accommodation and, as far as we were

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Wednesday night, which is that we hadn't been asked for

- aware, there had been a quick response, and that the task that we were particularly helping them on was providing more permanent homes. I think that's very consistent with where the department was.
- Q. Did you manage to speak to Nicholas Holgate at all
 before the cross—ministerial meeting at 4 o'clock that
 day?
- 8 A. No.

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- 9 Q. At 3.30 that day.
- 10 A. No, I didn't
- 11 Q. You didn't.
 - Now, we know that Jo Farrar did, I think. If we go, please, to CLG00 well, sorry, let me preface that.

Can we look at her witness statement,

{CLG00030653/16}, paragraph 50, first of all. This is

where she deals with that call and she ... This is you

where she deals with that call and she ... This is you, actually, your statement. You say there:

"... Jo Farrar spoke with him shortly after midday.
Her office circulated a readout of that call."
Yes?

21 A Yes

Q. Then let's look at that, {CLG00008140}, second email
 down at 16.26, from your office to MHCLG RED and also
 Sajid Javid's office, "Readout Jo's calls with LGA and
 [chief executive] K&C":

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1 "For information, please see below readouts of Jo's 2 calls today with Mark Lloyd (LGA) and Nick Holgate."

Day 285

- You can see that there are read—outs of two calls,
- 4 I think. The first is at 12.30, 15 June, where
- 5 Jo Farrar has a call with Nick Holgate; do you see that?
- 6 A. Yes.
- Q. If you go to the top of page 2 {CLG00008140/2}, duringthe call Nicholas Holgate is reported as saying that
- 9 RBKC was receiving "plenty of support from DCLG and 10 others"; do you see that?
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. "Risks:

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- 13 "• If a lot of people come back who can't get into
- 14 their homes.
- "• Getting people into permanent homes in an orderlyand quick way.
 - " Post traumatic stress."

Then if we go up to page 1 {CLG00008140/1} again, please, he says in the first bullet point there, or is noted as having said:

21 "They have found hotel accommodation for anyone with 22 need. He thinks that can roll over for as long as 23 needed."

Now, do you remember reading this email at the time?

25 A. Yes.

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- 1 Q. You do. What was the impression you were left with, do 2 you remember?
- 3 $\,$ A. I can't quite remember when I read it, but if I only saw
- 4 it after the time that's stated in this particular
- 5 version of it, ie 16.26, then by then I would have been
- 6 extremely worried about the council and have thought
- 7 that this was really, I'm afraid, a sign that
- 8 Nicholas Holgate was not gripping the situation and
- 9 didn't really understand what was going on.
- $10\,$ Q. Why, because of the discrepancy between --
- 11 A. Yes.

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- 12 Q. Right.
- 13 A. And, in particular, the fact that there was plenty of
- help, on the second page there, from DCLG, when we knewthat they hadn't really asked for any help.
- 16 Q. Indeed, on the contrary, had resisted it.
- 17 A. Yeah. What we didn't know at the time, I think, was
 - quite how problematic the hotel accommodation was that
- 19 had already been provided and how many issues there were
- 20 with things like food, and also about the uncertainty
- about how long people were able to stay there. So he's saying that that can roll over for as long as needed;
- what we know now is that that wasn't necessarily the
- case. But at the time, there were still plenty of signs
- 25 that this just felt complacent, and I think that was

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- 1 Jo's view. My guess is that Jo and I talked about this 2 before I even read the read-out and that she conveyed 3 her concern.
- 4 Q. Now, if you look about three-quarters of the way down 5 that bullet point list, you can see there is a reference there to: 6

"845 non—Grenfell Tower households are currently without access to their homes. Most are making their own arrangements. They are looking at when police and fire can reduce the size of the cordon."

 $\operatorname{\mathsf{Did}}\nolimits$ you read that as households or individuals , do vou remember?

- A. I don't think I really thought about that difference.
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15 Did the scale of the problem become apparent to you, 16 reading that?

- A. Yes. I don't remember exactly when it was that the 17 18 Lancaster West Estate issues really began to become 19 evident to us, but they were clearly very serious, and 2.0 the scale of the number of people who were homeless --21 temporarily homeless or in some cases it turned out to 22 be permanently homeless $--\ I$ don't quite remember when 23 that crystallised . This may have been one of the first
- indications of it. I don't remember. 25 Q. Now, let's just look at the next two bullet points:

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- " Grenfell Tower residents have been complaining for a long time about the council. They have a trail of letters written to the council.
 - " Nick said several people could make this worse than it is and the council is worried that they might need assistance from the police."

What was your understanding of what that was about, those two bullet points, whether taken together or separately?

- 10 A. I don't really know. I see it now as a sign of their 11 defensiveness that, you know, obviously there had been 12 a lot of complaints about the tower and about other 13 housing, and that perhaps had led to a certain, perhaps, 14 siege mentality, even, in the council, in how they 15 responded to those residents. That's how I interpret 16 it. I don't think I can say any more than that.
- 17 I don't want to over-interpret what Nicholas Holgate was 18 saying there.
- 19 Q. Was it your perception at the time -- and I don't want 2.0 to put words into your mouth, but you refer to "siege 21 mentality" -- that the relationship between the 2.2 residents and the council as recorded here might have 2.3 had some kind of influence on the way in which 2.4 Nicholas Holgate was approaching offers of help from

25 outside?

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A. Yes, possibly. I mean, I should say that although 2 I don't know Nicholas Holgate very well, he is, 3 you know, a man I believe of integrity, and actually 4 a very kind man, and I don't in any way interpret his 5 actions in these few days as somebody who didn't care or who wasn't trying to do the right thing. I think he was 6 7 completely overwhelmed by the task, not perhaps with the operational background in local government that might 8 9 have helped him, he was a policy official from 10 the Treasury originally , and he in the moment didn't 11 realise he needed to call for help. 12

And, I mean, perhaps — you know, I don't know if this is the right moment to raise this, but I think it is very difficult to know how you help somebody in that kind of situation, because the last thing you want to do is to stop people leading when they need to lead and get on with it. But when somebody is under stress and they don't realise they need help, they're usually the last person to see it . So I don't think you can rely on people under pressure to know when they have to be, as he was, removed from the situation because they're unable to discharge those responsibilities .

So I think he was in a very difficult position, and all sorts of factors were making it very difficult for him to lead the council in the way that was needed.

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1 MR MILLETT: Thank you.

2 Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?

3 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, I think it is. I think it's time we stopped so we can all get some 5 lunch, so we'll break there. We'll resume, please, at

6 2.05, and as before, please don't talk to anyone about

7 your evidence over the break. All right?

8 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

9 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.

10 (Pause)

11 Thank you very much, Mr Millett. 2.05, then,

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MR MILLETT: Thank you. 13

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you. 14

15 (1.05 pm)

16 (The short adjournment)

17 (2.05 pm)

2.4

18 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right, Dame Melanie, ready to carry

19 on, yes?

2.0 THE WITNESS: Yes. 21 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you.

2.2 Thank you, Mr Millett.

23 MR MILLETT: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

3.30, 15 June, ministerial cross-Whitehall meeting,

25 second of its kind.

1 Now, you didn't attend, did you?

- 2 A. No.
- 3 Q. But your colleagues Helen MacNamara and 4 Katherine Richardson did. I think.
- 5
- Q. Is it right that Helen MacNamara spoke to you after the 6 7 meeting to relay the concerns that had emerged?
- 8
- 9 Q. Do you remember the conversation?
- 10 A. Not particularly, but I do remember, in general terms, 11 discussing with Helen that afternoon all of the various 12 different worries that were beginning to come through 13 and that had crystallised in the meeting, as I was 14 saying earlier.
- 15 Q. Right.

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Now, let's go to {CLG00030440/6}, which is Helen MacNamara's first witness statement, paragraph 28, and I just want to show you paragraphs 28 and 29 on page 6. She says:

"28. Immediately following the meeting, whilst I remained in the meeting room, I spoke to Lorna Gratton, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary. She explained that there were Ministerial concerns about the organisation of the local relief effort, and that the Prime Minister herself was concerned.

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"29. I discussed these concerns with Melanie Dawes and explained my view that the Department needed to put greater pressure on RBKC to accept offers of support. I understand that Katherine Richardson, who was present during my discussion with Lorna Gratton, discussed it with Jo Farrar. I also emailed Jo Farrar directly, in the knowledge that she was due to accompany Sajid Javid and Alok Sharma on a Ministerial visit on the Friday morning.

Now, so far as that is an account of her conversation with you, does it accord with your recollection?

- 13 A. Yes
 - Q. Now, if we look at Katherine Richardson's statement. that's at {CLG00030412}. I'll show you the first page to identify the document. This is her witness statement to the Inquiry of 15 March 2019.

If we go, please, to page 21 {CLG00030412/21}, paragraph 77, she says this:

"I attended the cross-Ministerial meeting at 15:30 on the Thursday. Nick Holgate. RBKC Chief Executive. was not able to answer detailed questions about the situation on the ground and appeared quite defensive, trying to assure Ministers that no additional help was required. In my opinion he was not reassuring, and my

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sense was that others in the meeting agreed. It seemed 2

strange to me given the scale and complexity of the

3 incident that the Council were not asking for central 4 government support."

5 Did she — that is Katherine Richardson — relay

6 that to you, her impression to you? 7 A. No, not directly, as I recall. She might have done.

I might have seen her when she came back to the 8

department. But I remember the conversation with Helen

10 specifically . But I think we were all basically having

11 conversations about the same things at this point.

12 Did Helen MacNamara express to you her view that the 13 department needed to put more pressure on RBKC to accept 14 offers of support?

15 A. Yes

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Q. And what did you do about that? 16

17 A. Well, I thought that was right. I mean, I hadn't been

18 at the meeting myself, but I was aware of the various

19 concerns that had been raised during the day, and we

were getting increasingly worried, and at some point 20

21 I spoke to Jo Farrar that afternoon or early evening and 22 we agreed that she should go with the Secretary of State

23 and Alok Sharma the following day and see what was going 2.4

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Q. Can we go to {CLG00008227}, please. Now, this is

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1 an email of the following morning, 16 June 2017, the

2 Friday, and if you go to the top of the page, please,

3 you can see there's an email on that morning at 8.23,

from Helen MacNamara to Frances Kirwan within the DCLG,

5 forwarding an email below from Katherine Richardson to

Robert Mason and the ministers. It says:

"I mentioned to Melanie yesterday. We need to really $\,$ get on this . Actual PM is concerned and this will run away from us if we haven't done something concrete today

11 "Don't think politely waiting for Nick H to ask is 12 right tactic - we are basically being told to grip.'

13 Now, was it your approach to wait for

Nicholas Holgate to ask for help, politely or otherwise? 14

15 A. Well, no, we'd offered help many times, and by this 16 stage we were getting pretty worried that they weren't

17 responding to those offers, but actually also that the

18 evidence was that the situation on the ground was 19

deteriorating, or had already deteriorated, quite 2.0

significantly . So by this point on Friday morning, in 21 my mind, I was turning my thoughts to what we needed to

2.2 do to intervene in the council, not necessarily in

23 a formal sense, but how we needed to put people in

2.4 alongside them to support the recovery efforts.

25 Q. Now, looking at the conversation that she refers to

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"I just discussed briefly with Frances, and

I believe that MD's view ..."

And I think "MD" is you.

1		"yesterday", did Helen MacNamara make it clear to you	1	A.	Yes.
2		that there was in any way some kind of implicit	2	Q.	" is that we can be more helpful in other ways. It
3		criticism from the Prime Minister that waiting for	3		would be able to get a couple of lines we could use to
4		Nick Holgate to ask was the wrong tactic and that you	4		go back to No10 this morning on what we think the best
5		should be getting more of a grip as a department?	5		way forward is. I know there's a lot on, so sorry to
6	A.	I didn't really take it as criticism . I mean, I think	6		add another item to the pile!
7		it's quite common in these situations for the centre of	7		"Thanks,
8		government to express a view quite forcefully, and	8		"Tom."
9		I think if you're sensitive in the department you can	9		And that came from Tom Hinchcliffe, who was
10		see that as criticism, but sometimes you're just being	10		Sajid Javid's private secretary.
11		told something very clearly and you just have to hear	11		Do you know what that's referring to, that
12		it . So, you know, they were right, we did need to	12		conversation, or the belief that you had?
13		change our approach as central government, and we did	13	A.	So I was of the view —— and Frances Kirwan was my
14		that that morning. And, as I was saying earlier,	14		private secretary and ran my office, so she will have
15		I think —— and as I said in my witness statement,	15		accurately understood my views, and I was of the view
16		I think the question is what we could have done sooner.	16		that sending in teams of civil servants was not what
17		But by this stage, I don't think there was any	17		the council needed. What the council needed was —
18		disagreement going on amongst us that we needed somehow	18		well, I didn't know what they needed at that stage, to
19		to find a way to change what was going on on the ground.	19		be honest, at any level of detail, but I didn't think
20	0	Right.	20		that sending Whitehall officials in was likely to be the
21		We didn't quite know what was going on or what needed to	21		solution, simply because most civil servants have
22	Λ.	be changed, but Jo went there and I think immediately	22		absolutely no experience of emergency responses like
23		got on to the issues and began to come up with	23		this and could have made the situation worse rather than
		solutions.	24		better.
24 25	0		25		
23	Q.	Sticking with the morning of 16 June for the moment $$	23		So ministers throughout these days were quite keen
		133			135
1		we have jumped ahead in the chronology and we will come	1		to send officials in, and I felt that it was quite
2		back to the 15th very shortly, but just sticking with	2		important to push back on that. And I did think we
3		early morning on the 16th, the Friday $$ can we go to	3		could be helpful in other ways, I explain some of this,
4		$\{CLG00003272\}$ and look at the second email on the page.	4		I think, in my second witness statement, but through $$
5		It's an email from Lorna Gratton in Number 10 at 07.41	5		particularly through finance, which we did, through
6		on 16 June:	6		liaison, which we did, and in fact that was what
7		"Hello,	7		John Barradell asked for later on, on the Friday, and
8		"I spoke to Helen Mac yesterday after the cross	8		also through the victim support unit, supporting access
9		government meeting.	9		into central government services.
10		"There are still concerns here about how well	10	Q.	You told us about a discussion you had had with
11		organised the response effort is for those in receipt of	11		Sajid Javid on the morning of the 15th at 9.30, but was
12		it on the ground.	12		there a later discussion you had with him later that day
13		"Would it be helpful for them to have more support	13		at which you expressed the view attributed to you here?
14		from CLG (e.g a small team of people seconded similar to	14	A.	I don't know whether I expressed that view to
15		the victim support unit?)? Could you let me know what	15		Sajid Javid on the Thursday or the Friday, but I think
16		you think."	16		Frances is conveying my view to Sajid's
17		If you go then up to the first email, in the first	17		private secretary here, rather than me talking to Sajid
18		line on that page, you can see that Sajid Javid	18		directly . He was — at this point must have been on his
19		responds —— and I should have pointed out to you that	19		way to Kensington and Chelsea, so I don't think I saw
20		Lorna Gratton's email was to his office . He responds to	20		him on the Friday morning.
21		you or sends an email to you and Helen MacNamara:	21	O	Coming back, then, to the Thursday, 15 June, in the
22		"Morning all	22	٦.	evening, it's right, I think, according to Jo Farrar's
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you aware of that?

statement, that she sought contact with Nicholas Holgate

that afternoon or evening at about 5.00 pm; yes? Are

- A. She left him a message, I think, in the afternoon on the
 Thursday.
- 3 Q. Indeed.
- 4 A. Yes.

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- 5 Q. Exactly.
- 6 A. She sought to contact him, yes.
 - Q. She did, and I can show you the message. Let's have it up, just for the sake of the evidence. {CLG00003203}. It's an email confirming that she had left him
- 10 a message. The top email:

"I've left a message with the CEX. He will come back if he needs to, but I have told him you are working with his team."

Was this part of a strategy, perhaps, to apply a bit of pressure to Nicholas Holgate to accept your support at this point?

17 A. Well, yes, I think we were clear we needed to apply some
18 pressure, or else it wouldn't be accepted, the offer
19 that we were making, and so definitely we would have
20 been thinking at that point that we needed to be quite
21 forceful.

22 Q. Yes

Now, on the afternoon of the 15th, I think you and Jo Farrar came together to discuss the council's response. We know that from the statements. But was

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- that before or after her attempt to contact him at 5 o'clock, do you know? Do you remember?
- A. It was after the ministerial meeting, I think, so that
 would date it to later in the afternoon, and I don't
 know whether she contacted him after she and I had
 spoken or whether it was just before. I just can't
- 7 remember.
- 8 Q. Right.

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If we go to your first statement, please, at page 16 {CLG00030653/16}, paragraph 51, you say there that you discussed the response with Jo Farrar:

"Some of the officers working in the Council's housing teams were well—known to people in the Department, and our general view at that stage was that, in responding to the housing challenge, RBKC was capable and had significant expertise and experience."

Did they express their views of the council staff's expertise and experience to you?

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A. Not directly, no, but Laura Johnson in particular was
 known to, I believe, Fiona Darby and Lizzie Clifford,
 because they had both worked in local government
 housing, and they knew her to be an experienced housing
 director, and I think that was what they meant.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. And I think, to be honest, we probably rather

 $1 \hspace{1cm} \mbox{over-relied on that sense that this was a person who was}$

 $2\,$ capable because, in the end, that was just one person,

3 and I think we over—relied on that, rather than on any

4 broader sense of their capabilities or of the wider

5 leadership of the Gold effort in Kensington and Chelsea.

Q. Yes, thank you.

I think a decision was then made that Jo Farrar should visit the council the next day with ministers to assess the situation.

10 A. Yes.

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11 Q. Yes. Why was it decided that Dr Farrar should be the 12 one to attend?

13 A. Well, Helen MacNamara had a rest day on the Friday, and 14 then worked over the weekend, and she wasn't available.

But, in any event, Jo was the right person, in my

opinion, because she had run two councils and led

emergency responses, so she had all the right experience to, you know, really know what was going on and know

18 to, you know, really know what was going on and know what might be needed.

20 Q. We'll come to that meeting with the housing minister 21 I think shortly.

Before we do, can we turn first to events on the morning of 16 June, which we've covered a little bit already, but coming back to that.

25 {CLG00008289}. This is, if you look at the first

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 $1 \hspace{1cm} \text{email in the string, an email from Lorna Gratton to you,} \\$

or your office, and also the office of Sajid Javid,
 copied to Alastair Whitehead at Number 10, at 11.06 in

4 the morning, following a discussion between the two of

you and Louise Morgan; yes?

6 A. Yes

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7 Q. "Thanks very much for the useful conversation just now.
8 To confirm, for the meeting below (and for the PM to
9 confirm publicly this afternoon), we would like CLG to
10 be able to commit to ..."

Then there is a long list of bullet points, and I don't want to read them all out to you, but you can see them there:

"• A date by which all residents will have been re—housed, ideally this would be within 2 week[s] ...

" • Detail what checks are taking place on buildings ...

"• We know where all buildings with similar cladding are

"• ... fire brigade inspections ...

" • Offer/(impose) further support for RBKC in the form of additional coordination support ... seconded staff ...

" ■ Immediate review of the relevant building regulations ... "

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1 Then you say: 2 "You thought this all sounded do-able, please let me 3 know if any of that changes. Louise, grateful for 4 a heads up before the meeting (if you can) on exactly 5 what the offer will be on each. A copy of Sajid's briefing if that's the easiest way to do would be fine." 6 7 Then there's something about a victims of terrorism 8 unit as well 9 Now, I show you that. 10 If we go to your first statement, please, at page 17 11 $\{CLG00030653/17\}$, my having shown you that 12 contemporaneous email, paragraph 56, you say, under the 13 heading "16 June 2017": 14 "It had been increasingly clear overnight that there 15

May 26, 2022

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were problems with the response in North Kensington. Lorna Gratton (the Prime Minister's Private Secretary) had emailed the Secretary of State's office at 06:30 expressing concerns about how well organised the response effort was and suggesting that more support from the Department was needed."

I think we've seen that email.

"I spoke to Lorna to discuss the situation and agreed that we would quickly provide more information to Number 10 on rehousing and the support that was being provided by Central Government as well as the latest on

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building safety checks."

Now, you refer to the conversation there. First, do you remember when, even roughly, during the morning that took place?

- A. I think it was quite early, and when I saw the various emails that you were displaying earlier, I thought it was sensible for me to just have a chat with Lorna. I knew her, and I can't remember who instigated it, but I was very glad to speak to her and just try to cut through a little bit what was going on, and I think it was probably at about 8.30. It may have been a little bit later, but of that sort of broad time.
- 13 Q. Right, and was that, as recorded here, the full extent of your conversation or was anything else discussed?
 - A. Well, I'm not sure I've seen Lorna's contemporaneous note recently -- my apologies if I have referred to it in my statements before -- but I think this is about right. I mean, clearly there's quite a lot on building safety checks that we were discussing. You can see that from her record. I won't go on about that.

I do remember the rehousing target, as it became. being discussed, and you can see in Lorna's email that she says there were nuances, and I think I will have said: yes, there really were nuances. I think it was the first time that morning that a timescale was being

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suggested. The previous day it had been just about a commitment to rehouse in the local area, and so putting a timescale on it was clearly going to be more difficult, and I think I will have -- well, I know I did explain some of that. And the briefing that went in from the department into the meeting later that day, the cross-ministerial meeting, didn't include a timescale; it said "as early as possible", or something like that. So we had a discussion about that. But it was quite clear Number 10 wanted a time, and she put that in her email, which I think it was important that she did. because that was what ministers wanted.

What's not in my witness statement is the reference to the emergency co-ordinator, that part, I don't know whether there's a reference to that over the page, but that was also part of the conversation, and I recall talking to her about whether or not a team of civil servants would be useful, and explaining to her, as I was just doing now, why I thought that that wasn't going to be the right answer.

So her account is a bit more detailed than is in my witness statement, but it is consistent, yes. We discussed the full range of issues.

2.4 If we then go to {CLG00003345}, we can see, in the last 2.5 email on the page, an email at 11.05 entitled, "MD Lorna

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1 Chat"

2. A. Yes

3 Q. And it says:

> "Melanie has just spoken to Lorna and has agreed by 1pm."

Then it goes over the page $\{CLG00003345/2\}$:

"We would provide lines for the PM on rehousing people in the local area. We will look to do this with in two weeks and we would need to define what we mean by [permanent] and local area and ensure both speed and quality (which may need to be a bit longer) - Jo to work with the LA to set out what is possible."

Then there are other things as well, and you can see what they are. It says at the end:

"We understand that the PM will chair a meeting at 1:30 and will be visiting the site today again. Plus will be making an announcement in the early afternoon."

18 First, why was it deemed necessary for this 19 information to be provided to the PM by $1.00\ pm$ that 2.0 day?

21 A. Erm ..

2.2 Q. This particular information about rehousing and within 23

2.4 Well, clearly ministers wanted to make a commitment 2.5 about rehousing, and when I spoke to Lorna, I don't know

whether she said the Prime Minister's going to chair a meeting later on, she might not have known that by then, but clearly they wanted to make an announcement. There was a very big challenge in the media about rehousing, and lots of allegations that actually weren't true about people being placed in cities far away from London. But I think ministers felt they needed to get something out there quite quickly to supplement what they'd said the day before, and so that's why the 10 urgency

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In the end, I don't know whether we provided information for the Prime Minister prior to the meeting or whether we all just went along to the meeting and

15 Q. Did you look into how realistic it was to rehouse 16 everyone in the local area within two weeks?

17 A. I didn't look into it, but I didn't think it was going 18 to be deliverable, and when it says here in this 19 account. "We will look to do this within two weeks". 2.0 I don't think that was us volunteering that from DCLG or 21 me volunteering that; I think it is more, as Lorna 22 actually says in her account of the discussion, that the 2.3 Prime Minister or ministers wanted to do it in two weeks 2.4 and she understood that there were nuances, and I will

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1 Q. One of the nuances being it wasn't possible.

have explained those.

A. It just wasn't going to be possible. I mean, to be fair, I don't think we knew quite how impossible it would be, because I don't think we had the experience of quite how difficult it is to take, you know, bereaved and traumatised families through the decision-making and the -- that they need to make when they're thinking about longer-term housing options, and I don't think my ministers had that in their minds that morning, really. that was the missing thing.

Q. Now, moving forward into the morning, {CLG00030638}. We have already referred to the visit by Jo Farrar that day, and here is a text at 10.30, "Great".

Now. hold on, the timing is not quite right for this. This I think is 13.21, actually, and it says:

"Great. Will report pack. Personally worried that Council are out of their depth. Have said we will give some housing officers. Will also sort out [comms] support with LGA."

Then I think your response:

"Feel free to make big judgment call if we need to make massive Whitehall offer or demand Iga one. Part of what we need to do is keep leaping ahead of the immediate situation."

What did you mean there by a "massive Whitehall 146

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2 I think, by the way, that this exchange was earlier in 3 the morning because, as I think you're hinting, by 13.21 4 John Barradell was already in place and the meeting was about to start in the COBR meeting rooms. 5

I didn't precisely know. I was leaving it to Jo's judgement, and I trusted her judgement. But the sort of things I was thinking about were previous situations I'd been involved in when a significant injection of local government expertise had been provided to councils that were failing or were struggling to deliver core parts of their duties, and obviously sometimes that had been done through interventions and formal interventions and commissioners, but sometimes it had been done through voluntary panels or taskforces, and those things had been organised and orchestrated by the Local Government Association. So I just wanted Jo to feel free to offer

19 Q. I think you then spoke to her and agreed it would be 20 beneficial for John Barradell, who was already on site, 2.1 to take over as Gold Command.

whatever she thought was needed.

- 22 A. Yes.
- 2.3 Q. Do you know what else was discussed in that call, do you 2.4 remember?
- 25 A. No, I'm sure Jo will have told me about how worried she

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1 was. I doubt we spoke for very long, because there was a lot going on, but she will have -- I think she was the 2 3 person who told me that John Barradell had been 4 mobilised in.

5 Q. Right.

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Now, if we go to {CLG00008313}. Let me show you page 1 at the start to show that you're at the top of this email chain. It comes through to you, do you see that, or at least your office?

10 A. My office, yes.

11 If we go, then, to the bottom of page 2 $\{CLG00008313/2\}$, 12 the start of the email I want to show you is at 00.25, 13 so after midnight on 16 June, and it's from 14 Charlie Parker at Westminster to a number of others, so 15 it filters its way through to you the next morning. 16 But if you go to the final paragraph on page 3 17 $\{CLG00008313/3\}$, let's look at that together, he says 18

> "I have offered NH [Nicholas Holgate] total WCC support however, I don't believe he quite understands the magnitude of the problem and the implications of a Government led inquiry. I will be also offering him a lot of personal support and will see him tomorrow. However, I fear a lot of turmoil/uncertainty as to his and leading members future may be on the horizon. This

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1 will be exacerbated by the constant updating of " • Nick Holgate did not come across well yesterday 2 fatalities [numbers]." 2 at the cross government ministerial meeting 3 Now, when you got that email, you could see -- is 3 "• There is a lot of anger from the residents 4 this right? -- that at least the chief executive of 4 directed to towards the LA. "• He said it is not acceptable that people have now 5 Westminster Council thought that the chief executive of 5 RBKC did not understand the magnitude of the problem; 6 6 spent 2 nights in a rest centre. 7 7 " • Police are happy for there to be a meeting with 8 8 the residents which includes all of the appropriate key A. Yes 9 Q. What was your reaction to learning of that in the email 9 agencies from the multi-agency SCG to talk to residents 10 and address some of their concerns where possible. LA 10 when you saw it the next day? 11 A. By the time I saw this email. I think John Barradell was 11 are not keen on this idea." 12 12 already in his new role, or at least it had been agreed And it goes on a little bit further. 13 that he would be in the new role, and I remember 13 Now, do you remember, did you do anything on receipt 14 thinking that this -- we were in exactly the same place 14 of that email at 14.47? 15 as Charlie Parker had been, and I remember thinking: 15 A. At that time, I was in the ministerial meeting, so 16 16 I wish he'd sent that email to me as well last night. I can't say exactly when I saw this email, but it's very 17 17 that might have been helpful. consistent with everything that was being discussed by 18 Q. Right, I see. And when you saw this at 11.47, was this 18 that point. So all of those issues are -- we were well 19 before or after Jo Farrar had had a conversation with 19 aware of, and indeed quite worried about. 20 20 Q. Right. Nicholas Holgate about him stepping back? 2.1 A. I'm not quite sure, but I am pretty confident that I did 2.1 A. But by that point, John Barradell had taken over. 2.2 not see this email, and neither did Jo, until after she 2.2 Q. Yes. I see. Now, then moving further into the day on the 16th, had spoken to John Barradell. I don't think this email 23 2.3 2.4 influenced the decision-making. I think it corroborated 2.4 Friday, {CAB00005727}. Email from Lorna Gratton, 19.37, the decision that we'd made or that Jo had agreed with 2.5 to you and Louise Morgan, "Further support to RBKC": 149 151 1 John and John O'Brien, rather than actually being part 1 "Louise, Melanie, "As you know, the PM met local residents from 2 of what made them decide it. 2 3 Q. So did it corroborate the concerns that had been raised 3 Grenfell this afternoon and left with the overwhelming 4 with you -message that the council don't have a grip. 5 A. Yes 5 "I know you know this, and that's why you've set up Q. -- by Jo Farrar from her visit? 6 Gold Command, but in particular, she's keen that we make 6 7 7 A. Yes, and also what we knew from Thursday about how we a further offer to RBKC/Gold Command (of the kind that 8 8 were finding the council to deal with. they find very hard to refuse) Q. Then let's go to {CLG00003399}. This takes us into the 9 9 "In particular: 10 mid-afternoon of that day. Email from Robert Mason of 10 "- pull together what additional resource you 11 RED to Sajid Javid, copied to you, and to the office of 11 quickly put in to the Council and have it ready to go. 12 Jo Farrar. So this comes up to you at 14.47, as you can 12 "- make contact with Gold Command in order to go 13 see, and what is important about this is the email below 13 round K&C and identify where we could immediately and 14 it which is in the string. It starts at the bottom of 14 helpfully place people. 15 15 "I understand you're kindly pulling together a short your screen, but if we can scroll up, please, we can see the whole of it. 16 16 email for us on what CLG will be offering, so we can put 17 It comes from Philip James, who is a resilience 17 it in front of the PM.' 18 adviser in RED, and he says: 18 Now, I don't know whether there's a response to that 19 "Katherine, Rob, 19 email that you sent to Lorna Gratton. Can you help? 2.0 "Ahead of the SCG. I spoke to the Police Gold — 2.0 A. No, I'm afraid I don't recall. I mean, at about the 21 21 Commander Neil Jerome. same time. I emailed in to Mark Sedwill giving my

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assessment of where things were following the meeting,

but I don't recall that, and it looks as though it came

directly into my own personal email box, so I will have

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seen it. I didn't leave the office until quite late

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"In a confidential conversation he raised his

concern regarding RBKC Local Authority.

"The main points he made are -

"• The LA are way out of their depth.

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1 that night. I just don't remember if I responded.

- 2 Q. I mean, did you know what was involved in making
- 3 a Corleone—esque offer of this nature?

and determination.

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4 A. Well, look, from this point on, once John Barradell had 5 been put in place, as I said in my email to Mark Sedwill later that afternoon, which we may come on to, although 6 7 the underlying problems clearly weren't solved, I felt that finally we had leadership in place that had 8 9 identified the right issues, he was drawing people 10 around him to be able to get things done with the right 11 expertise, and there was just a sense of palpable grip

Now, I think it took Gold Command several days to recover the problems created by those early days and the mistakes, but my view from this point on was that we had to put what effort we had in central government into supporting Gold Command.

So what I read this email as saying now is that ministers were still quite uncomfortable and wanted us to do more directly from central government, but there was another meeting the following morning, which I believe the Prime Minister chaired, and so I think that was another conversation that we went round the same questions of, "Should we do more?", but ultimately concluded we should support Gold Command, but we did

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- also —— we had already agreed by this evening, actually, to put together the victims unit.
 - Q. Yes, and we may touch on that shortly.

Let me just show you an email sent a little bit later the same evening, {CLG00005219}. At 19.54 on 16 June, Alastair Whitehead, second email down, to Peter Hill at Number 10 and others, and it looks as if this is an internal Number 10 communication:

"All.

"The Prime Minister called the Leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council this evening — herewith a readout."

And there are six bullet points:

- "• The PM reported that, from her visit, the overwhelming message from those affected was that there had been no communication from the Council, and people didn't feel that the Council was coordinating things properly.
- "• Leader reported there had been a big response from the voluntary sector, and that Council officers were engaged but there had been some confusion and the Council is not held in the highest regard.
- " ullet The PM emphasised the issues that had been raised with her, and that the financial aid must get through DCLG will be in contact with RBKC and ensure that proper processes are in place."

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Then it continues:

- "• Leader committed to having all people rendered homeless in housing by the end of the day but noted a few times the difficulty of getting permanent rehousing in K&C. The PM said it was important to have the numbers involved so we can monitor progress on the commitment, and to be sure of where all the people are.
- "• Leader said that RBKC needed help to free up housing the PM said that DCLG will be able to help identify housing in other boroughs.
 - "• The PM sought an assurance that someone from the Council will be in touch this evening with every one of the support centres the Leader agreed this."

Now, that's a read—out from a discussion they had.

Were you aware of the detail of that discussion or
the particulars of this email on that evening?

17 A. I don't think so, no.

18 Q. You say in your first witness statement at paragraph 10 19 $\{CLG00030653/4\}$ —— there is no need to go to it —— that 20 one of the DCLG's longstanding functions is to provide 21 what you call a link between central government and 22 local responders when it comes to responding to 23 emergencies. Do you know why it took the Prime Minister 2.4 personally visiting the scene for those issues to be 2.5 fully aired and then action taken?

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1 A. Well, I think all these issues were already on the 2 table. You know, we'd had a meeting earlier that day, 3 chaired by the Prime Minister, with John Barradell and Nicholas Holgate on the line, and many of these issues 5 had been discussed, including the need to sort out 6 housing, and I think when the Prime Minister says that 7 DCLG, for example -- I'm talking about the penultimate $\,$ 8 bullet -- will be able to help identify housing in other 9 boroughs, that wasn't new: I mean, she was saving what 10 we'd already discussed and aired in ministerial meetings 11 not just on Friday, but I think in previous days. The 12 permanent rehousing work had started some days before.

So I think the issues around financial aid getting through, I don't know whether that was discussed on the Friday afternoon. That may have been a new issue that emerged in the evening. But I see this as a continuation of a conversation. And I'm not surprised that every time anyone visited, there was a slightly new issue that needed to be sent back, but the point was that it should be sent back, and I presume that at some level Number 10 did communicate some of this back into DCLG. I don't know, but I assume they did. I would have expected them to have done.

Q. Yes. My question really is: is there anything in thisemail and this conversation which this email reflects

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1 which hadn't been discussed and brought to light in the 2 earlier meeting that day at 13.30?

- A. I don't think so, no. Except possibly the financial aid issue being very difficult operationally, that may have come through slightly later.
- Q. I follow. 6

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Now, let's go to {CAB00012015}. This takes us a little bit earlier in the afternoon. This is an email on the Friday afternoon from Mark Sedwill to

10 Katharine Hammond:

11 "Katherine

"Well done with today's meeting."

And I think that's the 13.30 meeting, which we're going to come to, perhaps backwards, but never mind:

"It was clear that K&C are completely out of their depth, so we should probably have prompted a DCLG intervention earlier, but all that can come out via lessons learned idc [in due course]. Shall I follow up with Melanie on London/HMG support for K&C or do you think all that is in hand?"

First, do you agree with Mark Sedwill's assessment that "we [as in central government, or the CCS] should probably have prompted a DCLG intervention earlier"?

A. I think, as I was saving to you this morning, that Jo and I should have thought on Wednesday and Thursday

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- 1 about whether or not London Resilience was being 2 mobilised in support of the council, and that that would 3 have been the right intervention, and indeed turned out to be the right intervention, although it was a bigger 5 one than usual, and so yes, I think central government collectively should have thought about that more on 6 7 Wednesday and Thursday. I've always believed and still 8 do believe that it's about the London Gold support being 9 provided earlier, rather than a team of civil servants 10 going on the ground to somehow take over or support.
 - Q. Was it your view, though, that the incident should also perhaps have prompted an earlier intervention or co-ordination by the Cabinet Office, the CCS?
- 13 14 A. Well, I would have hoped that we would have got there 15 before them, but there were two meetings on Wednesday 16 and Thursday when certainly it's true that there was no 17 challenge from the centre that we should be intervening, 18 and, in fact, almost no mention, including in this 19 email, about the importance of the London Gold 2.0 arrangements and the London Resilience arrangements, and 21 this is where I think the Cabinet Office, perhaps. 2.2 you know, and everybody at the centre, was thinking in 2.3
 - terms of what central government should do, rather than about activating the existing resilience arrangement adequately for the task in hand. So I think they were

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slightly on the wrong place on some of this.

2 I also think that the fact that there was nobody 3 there from the local area apart from from the

4 Mayor's Office at the Wednesday meeting didn't help,

5 because one of the big factors that alerted us to the

problems on Thursday was just the way that Nick Holgate 6 7

wasn't able to handle the questions he was asked, and he wasn't there on Wednesday. I know that was an 8

9 administrative oversight, I believe, but it just seems

10 quite odd to me that nobody was there and somehow nobody

11 scrabbled about when they realised that in the meeting

12 and went and found somebody. So, again, that was a gap 13 in the intelligence that was brought to bear in the CCS

14 meetings

15 Q. Now, last thing on this: he asks, "Shall I follow up 16 with Melanie on London/HMG support for K&C"; did he? 17

Did Mark Sedwill?

18 A. No, I don't think so.

19 Q. Right.

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Now, we know that the taskforce meeting took place at 13.30 on 16 June, chaired by the Prime Minister, and we've covered that and the documents with other

23 2.4 You attended that meeting, didn't you, with

25 Alok Sharma and others?

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- 1 A. On Friday?
- 2. Q. On the Friday.
- 3 A. Yes, I did. I'm not recorded as having attended in the minutes, but I was there.
- 5 Q. Yes, according to your statement at paragraph 65

6 {CLG00030653/20}, I think, but also John Barradell was 7

- there, wasn't he?
- 8 A. He was on the phone.
- 9 Q. Yes, he'd dialled in.
- 10 A. Yeah
- 11 Do you remember, did John Barradell say anything at the 12 meeting?
- 13 A. Yes, he said a lot.
- 14 Q. Did he articulate any difficulties that he had

15 encountered?

16 A. I think you'd have to go back to the minutes, but what

17 I recall is that he gave a sense of the challenge he

18 thought he was facing, the things that needed to be

19 done. I had spoken to him before the meeting. I'd

2.0 never met him before, but we spoke briefly before the

21 meeting, and he had told me to expect that it might be

2.2 a bit odd because -- as to who would speak, compared to

23 him or Nicholas Holgate, but in the end he took over,

2.4 pretty much, and I don't think Nicholas Holgate really

2.5 said very much at all, is my recollection.

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- 1 Q. Was it your clear understanding at the time that
- 2 John Barradell had taken over -
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- 4 ${\sf Q}.\ --$ as opposed to standing alongside supporting
- 5 Nicholas Holgate?
- A. Yes 6
- 7 Q. Did you have any understanding of what the basis for 8 that takeover was?
- 9 A. No, not at a level of detail, but I understood that he 10 was now the Gold Commander for the recovery effort, was
- 11 I think what it was called, they were the recovery
- 12 taskforce, but we were clearly in response mode as well
- 13 Q. Now, having got to the end of 16 June 2017 and discussed 14
- 15 your concerns, am I right in thinking that it was clear 16 to you at the end of that day that the situation in RBKC 17
- was still very challenging --
- 18 A. Yes.
- Q. $\,\,$ notwithstanding that John Barradell had been in 19 20 charge since earlier that day?
- 21 A. Yes, it was still very challenging.
- 2.2 Q. And can we enumerate those challenges in particular,
- 2.3 including protests, challenges faced by some of the
- 2.4 families, the situation at the rest centres, reports of
- 25 unrest, chaos on the streets; yes?

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- 1 A Yes
- 2 Q. Were you aware that John Barradell had had a call with 3 the Secretary of State that evening at about 7.00 pm?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. You were?
- A. I think I probably suggested it. 6
- 7 Q. Were you on that call?
- 8 A. No.

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- 9 Q. No. Were you aware that John Barradell had told the 10 Secretary of State that he had made significant progress 11 such that he, the Secretary of State, could be assured 12 that the situation was coming under proper control?
- 13 A. I can't recall exactly how I became aware of what they discussed, but that sounds perfectly plausible to me, 14 15 that that would have been what he said.
- 16 Q. Let's then move into the evening of the 16th, {CLG10009767}. Now, what we see here, second email 17 18 down, is an email from you to Mark Sedwill, 20.26, and 19 if you look at the third line down, you say:
 - "As I said in the margins of COBR, John Barradell took over at lunch time as gold command for the whole recovery and he has just rung me with an update. He has clearly made very significant progress this afternoon and I think we can now be assured that the situation is coming under proper control.

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"The key points ..."

Then you set them all out.

3 Could I just ask you whether it was your impression 4 that he had made significant progress or something that

he'd told you?

A. Well, it was mainly what he'd told me. I hadn't been 6 7 there myself on the ground, but I had heard him

8 describing what he was doing in the meeting earlier on, 9 and I had no reason to doubt that the things he was

10 telling me were true. I was particularly assured by the

11 way that he was bringing in leadership around him, and

12 that we had, at that point, three serving

13 chief executives. I think by the end of the weekend it

14 was another two

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. And it was really his overall understanding of what 17 needed to be done that I found persuasive. I knew it

18 was going to take a long time to get those things done.

19 Q. Now, we've seen the bullet points with others in their 2.0 evidence, particularly Katharine Hammond. I don't need 21 to re-read them to you, particularly since they're your

22 own record, but can we take it that that is an accurate

2.3 record of the gist of the points in the call?

2.4 Yes, I stand by this record completely. This is what 2.5

John said, but it's also how I expressed it to

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Mark Sedwill, was what I believed to be true at the time.

Q. Indeed.

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Now, you go on to say, after the list of bullet

"On K&C itself, John is clear that they are in a bad way. At official level the gold structure manages this risk for the time being - it has basically taken over. At political level other London Councils are coming in with support. After the immediate crisis is over we will clearly need to consider a long term solution."

Now, what did you mean by, "At political level", or what did you think he meant by, "At political level other ... Councils are coming in with support"?

15 A. I don't particularly remember the political element of 16 this at the time, but what I think I must have been referring to is that other councillors, ie elected 18 politicians, so at a political level, were coming in to 19 support the elected leadership of the council as well. 2.0 I can't quite remember with this distance what that 21 support was, because I was mainly concerned with the

2.2 official $\$ arrangements, but I think that $\$ must -- there

23 must have been something going on to support

2.4 Nick Paget-Brown, and that must have been what I was 25 referring to, is my best guess.

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Opus 2 Official Court Reporters 21 get the information we need on rehousing etc."

22 Is that right?

- 2.3 A. Yes.
- 2.4 Q. You had done that?
- A. Yes, we had.

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- 1 Q. So is it right that by the time you sent that email to Mark Sedwill, you were of the view that the response had 2 3 significantly improved?
- A. Well, I was aware that the leadership and the 5 capabilities had significantly improved.
- Q. Now, we have --6
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. I'm sorry.
- 9 A. But I wasn't, I think, really passing any judgement on 10 the situation on the ground.
- 11 Q. I see. So your impression was that things had be done 12 by John immediately, but the results had not yet started 13 to filter through?
- 14 A. Yes, I don't think I was saying they hadn't filtered 15 through vet, but I wasn't assuming they had, and I don't 16 think there's anything in there in my email that says 17 that it was, you know, significantly improved for the 18 survivors and those who had lost loved ones or those 19 affected by the fire, but I was clear that their 2.0 leadership and capability was significantly better than
- 21 it had been in the morning. 2.2 Q. Now, this email goes to Mark Sedwill at 20.26. If we go
- 23 to {CAB00004653}, we can see that he responds the same 2.4 evening at 22.27, or at least he comes to you at that
- 25 time. It is a response.

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Jeremy Heywood asks:

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2 "What is the actual position on displaced tenants? 3

Are they still being housed locally in hotels?

4 "I assume none are literally having to sleep on the streets?!" 5

You respond three minutes later at 22.30 that evening:

"None on the streets. All in hotels or in some cases still in rest centre if that's their preference.

"They are tricky families to rehouse especially in these terrible circumstances but it's happening - this will be a key set of stats being reported into cobr [regularly].

"Alok is all over this and the tower block checks." Now, my question is: where did you get the information to answer Jeremy Heywood's question that none were on the streets. all were in hotels or in some cases still in the rest centre?

A. I must have known that that was the case, particularly given that I responded so quickly, or at least I must have been told that that was the case. You know, he was saying, "Are they literally having to sleep on the streets?", which implies a level of being forced to sleep on the streets because there was no alternative. and I replied, "Well, no, they have hotels, or in some

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cases they're in the rest centres". And I think by this hour I had already spoken to the Secretary of State about the family he was particularly concerned about, for whom efforts had been made during that day to find a solution but they just hadn't worked and that family had decided to stay in the rest centre, so I knew that there were some people in the rest centre.

Q. Right.

 $\{CLG00009897/2\}$, please. There is an email from Sally Randall, second email down there, to Ellen Reaich, copied to Fiona Darby, Lizzie Clifford and Rory McBride, "rough sleeping":

"Fllen

"I passed on your feedback that outreach teams had found no Grenfell victims sleeping rough. However, SoS said that Eleanor Kelly had reported that there were Grenfell victims sleeping in cars and parks, and asked us if we could reconcile the two bits of information.

"It's not super urgent - I don't need an answer today."

The date of that email is 22 June 2017, so that would be the Thursday week after the fire. But is it the case that, in fact, even by then there had been or by then there were findings that some Grenfell victims had been sleeping in cars and parks?

- A. I don't know. I've not seen these emails before, so I wasn't aware of this.
- Q. If we go, then, to {CLG00008779/2}, please, at the
 bottom of the page, first, to establish the date, this
 is now the Saturday, 17 June 2017, at 11.47, from
 Mark Sedwill to you, copied to people at the
- Cabinet Office, including Katharine Hammond:
 Over the page, please, page 3 {CLG00008779/3}:

9 "Hi Melanie"
10 "Thanks. I was on the phone at today's COBR. A few

points struck me ..."

Then halfway down the email:

"— John B's sense of grip was palpable so I hope that the situation on the ground will now gain and demonstrate some momentum, but

"— do we need a Gold for Whitehall on all the wider issues , or maybe a Gold plus Gold Minister eg Jo F[a] rrar plus Greg Hands? They would have to drop everything else . I fear this will become our New Orleans otherwise.

21 "Mark."

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First, what did you understand Mark Sedwill's reference to New Orleans to mean here?

A. To be honest, I didn't really know. He and I discussed
 this the following day, but I was guessing, you know,

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- 1 a humanitarian crisis on a very large scale.
- Q. Did you consider the suggestion that there be a Gold forWhitehall or a Gold plus Gold minister?
- 4 A. Yes, we discussed it at some length on Sunday morning, and it was a very constructive conversation, actually,
- and Mark and I were trying to work through what the
- 7 various different elements of the work were. He knew
- 8 I only had three directors general to lead on this.
- 9 I had already agreed with Jeremy Heywood that I would 10 have a fourth to lead on building safety. We were --
- 11 I spent much of Sunday trying to find that person,
- 12 talking to different people. But we were trying to work
- out what Helen's role could be, what Jo's role could be,
- what my role could be, and the outcome of our
- conversation was summarised in my email to him, which maps what we had discussed, and in the end he agreed
- with me that my ministers, Sajid Javid and Alok Sharma,should remain the overall lead, but also that Nick Hurd
- should remain the overall lead, but also that Nick Hur should play the role of specific support for the
- community, which he did for a very long time. So we
 sort of agreed it then.
 This was really, I think, the moment where we were
- thinking about the recovery phase, and this was probably the turning point when we shifted a bit more into that

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25 mode and thought about the structures and

- 1 accountabilities that were going to be needed.
- $2\,$ $\,$ Q. Let's then turn into 17 June a bit more closely, the
- 3 Saturday.
- 4 I think you recall there was a Grenfell recovery
- 5 taskforce meeting at 11 o'clock that meeting.
- 6 A. Yes, there was.
- 7 Q. You attended that with Alok Sharma and
- 8 Katherine Richardson, I think.
- 9 A. Yes, and the Secretary of State.
- $10\,$ $\,$ Q. And the Secretary of State, indeed. How would you
 - describe the mood of that meeting?
- 12 A. It was very sober -- all those meetings were very sober,
- 13 because of the nature of the events -- but it was
- 14 constructive. I thought it was a good meeting
- $15\,$ Q. I think it's right, isn't it, summarising your statement
- at paragraph 78 {CLG00030653/25}, there were a number of
- 17 key actions identified for your department, including
- 18 more visible presence at Grenfell to facilitate access
- 19 to support services; yes?
- 20 A. Yes

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- 21 Q. Providing additional financial help for the victims.
- 22 A. Yes.
- 23 Q. And monitoring progress on what I think had by then
- 24 become the three—week announced target for rehousing.
- 25 A. Yes.

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- $1\,$ $\,$ Q. Yes. Then after that meeting, you went -- is this
- 2 right? -- to Portland House with the Secretary of State.
- 3 A. Yes, I did.
- 4 Q. Yes. Why did you do that?
- 5 A. Well, at this point I hadn't actually been to the local
- 6 area, and I thought it was quite important that I get
- 7 an understanding of what was going on, but we weren't
- 8 able to do that because of the public order issues . We
- 9 went instead to the Gold Command headquarters at
- Portland House. And actually later that day we were
- asked by John Barradell that there be no further
- Whitehall visits, and so we respected that.
- 13 Q. I think when you got there you saw several London
- $14 \qquad \qquad \text{chief executives working full-time in Gold Command; is} \\$
- 15 that right?
- 16 A. Yes. Well, they'd just arrived, I think, but they were,
- 17 I think, to be deployed full—time, at least for
- 18 a few weeks.
- 19 Q. I think they included, is this right, Eleanor Kelly from
- 20 Southwark?
- $21\,$ $\,$ A. Carolyn Downs and Paul Najsarek as well, I remember.
- 22 Q. Yes. Did you gain the impression that they were well
- 23 enough resourced?
- $24\,$ $\,$ A. They were starting, and certainly when I saw those
- individuals , I was very impressed. These were some of

1 the really heavyweight London chief executives.

2 Q. Now, if we go to your first statement, you say at 3 paragraph 80 on page 26 $\{CLG00030653/26\}$, of this 4 meeting, in the second half of the paragraph:

> "I asked John what more we could do to help. He said there was a significant obstacle, in that housing was not fully under the Gold Command structure and this was needed to manage the relief effort fully . He asked me to persuade Nicholas Holgate to pass the I had a long conversation with Nicholas. He agreed to my request, and John later told me the transfer of responsibility had taken place."

14 Now, why had the element of the response or perhaps 15 recovery relating to housing remained with 16 Nicholas Holgate and not been brought under the Gold 17 arrangements?

- 18 A. Well, on the Friday evening I thought it had moved 19 across. That was in my email to Mark Sedwill, that it 20
- 21 Q. Yes.

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2.2 A. And so I was a bit surprised to hear that this was still 2.3 a sticking point on the Saturday. My understanding is 2.4 that, in the end, these were very unusual arrangements. 25 for John effectively to take over in the role of

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- 1 chief executive of the council in his Gold role, and it
- 2 was one that was done by mutual agreement with
- 3 Nicholas Holgate, and I assume that Nicholas Holgate
- hadn't wanted to move the housing work across, and that
- 5 was the impression I got from John on Saturday.
- 6 Q. So, to be clear, your impression from John Barradell was 7 that Nicholas Holgate had been reluctant to surrender
- 8 control of the housing or rehousing effort?
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. Did he give you a sense of why, why Nicholas Holgate was 11
- 12 A. No, not really. All I remember is that without them 13 having that $\ \ responsibility$, they really weren't 14 effectively able to communicate with the residents or do 15 most of the things that were needed for the recovery.
- 16 Q. Did John Barradell ask for any further help from the 17 department at that time?
- 18 A. Yes, he asked me to go and persuade Nicholas to move the 19 housing element across to Gold, and that's what I did.
- 2.0 Q. Other than that?
- 2.1 A. No. I mean, he'd already asked for liaison, which was
- 2.2 provided by Gill McManus. He asked for a few things
- 23 over that weekend, I can't remember exactly what when, 2.4
- but this is the one I remember from Saturday afternoon. 25
 - Q. I think there was also communications assistance, with

- Simon Wren moving from the Home Office to the DCLG to
- help or act as the new director of communications; is
- 3 that -

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- 4 A. Yes, that was a decision that I made and was seeking
- 5 support on. It wasn't anything to do with the
- Gold Command. So that was entirely a government 6
 - decision. We did place Farooq Mulla with Gold as
- a communications specialist. I think that had happened 8
- 9 by Saturday morning, though. I think that was probably 10
- agreed the day before. 11 Was that organised by DCLG or by the Home Office or --
- 12 Α By DCLG. Faroog was one of our staff.
- 13 Did that resolve the concerns that you had had reported
- 14 to you in the early hours of 16 June, which we've seen,
- 15 which was that the department wasn't completely on top 16 of the communications?
- 17 A. Yes. I mean, the communications from the department's
- 18 perspective -- so now we're -- we've come back to
- 2 Marsham Street, away from Portland House, I think. 19
- 20 The conversation — the concern I had on Thursday
- 21 afternoon and Friday was that, as I explain in my
- 22 witness statement, we had a very small communications
- 23 team, it had been quite significantly cut, and our
- 2.4 deputy director was also very new, and this was
- 2.5 an absolutely massive national media story, and I needed

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- 1 somebody with the expertise to be able to answer calls
- from the Daily Mail and all the broadcasters and so on, 2
 - and that was what I asked Alex Aiken for help in
- securing, and Simon Wren came across on Saturday morning
- 5 to help, and, yes, it did resolve things, because he was
- 6 just able to manage that kind of media story, and also
- 7 to liaise very effectively with Number 10 and other
- 8 government departments, which was important.
- 9 Now, continuing on the theme of resources. I think you 10 spoke to the Cabinet Office a number of times to secure
- 11 additional people with experience of managing and
- 12 co-ordinating internal departmental responses to
- 13 a crisis
- A. Yes 14

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- 15 Q. Why did you make those requests?
- 16 A. Because we didn't really have the expertise. I mean,
- 17 overall, there was definitely an issue with numbers in
- 18 the department; we were about 50% of the size that we'd
- 19 been in 2010 at this point in 2017. But the problem
- 2.0 that worried me most was that we had a few gaps in
- 21 capability, and one of them was as I was describing this
- 2.2 morning, was just the ability to actually set up and run
- 23 a response cell inside the department to co-ordinate all
- 2.4 the work that we were doing in the crisis, and that
- 2.5 needed to sit alongside RED in the role that they had in

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feeding the CCS machinery and liaising directly with the local area.

So we had a go at setting that up on Friday, but it was a bit too like what RED do, so it was a bit too much just about information flows. I think there's an email from Rob Mason where he describes being very pleased that we'd called on their expertise, and we were calling on their expertise, but it wasn't quite enough because it wasn't really about decision—making. So I was desperately keen to get somebody from CCS to help us with that, and eventually lan Whitehouse came across and did that for us. But it wasn't until the following week, and it was a bit late, to be honest.

14 Q. Yes

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Just picking this up on at $\{CLG10009757/2\}$. This is part of an email which starts on page 1 $\{CLG10009757/1\}$, just to pick up the timing of this email, please, and who it was from. It's from you to Jeremy Heywood; yes?

19 A. Yes.

Q. And at the very top of the chain, it filters its way - well, there is a response, I think, to you from
 Sue Gray:

23 "Thank you so much.

"As you know, Jeremy doesn't have a clue what I get up to so really appreciate you sending this email ..."

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Did you have a discussion with Sue Gray before you sent this email?

- A. The conversation with Sue Gray will have been about the public inquiry, because that's what she was doing through these days. I don't recall when I spoke to her, but we will have spoken frequently, I think.
- 7 Q. Right.

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Now, the email itself says:

"Jeremy

"Just to let you know the main things we've done today." $% \begin{center} \begi$

Then if we go, please, to page 2 {CLG10009757/2}, you say in the last paragraph under "Finally" -- it's not really the last paragraph, but it's the last big

"... you should also know that we are doing a lot to talk to and comfort DCLG staff involved in this policy area, and in the regulator, some of whom are very upset. We also have at least one member of staff — a new apprentice — with a close friend in hospital and the father missing. Our part of the 2MS building will be surrounded by a protest tomorrow evening, so we are going to be advising our staff to go home at 5pm. As I said to you on the phone last night, at some point we

may need to reflect on the impact of cuts to the $\,$ civil $\,$ 178

service (DCLG will be less than 50% of its 2010 size by 2020) on some of our deep expert policy functions. The expertise is still there (and it's excellent) but it is sparse and overloaded."

Now, I put that to you.

Was there a wider problem here regarding resourcing at DCLG and RED, or perhaps or RED, which was manifesting itself in the response at government level by this point?

A. I don't think it was manifesting itself at government level, no. I think we — you know, I'm very proud of what we did in these days. It was immensely challenging, and it wasn't perfect and we didn't get everything right, but given the completely unprecedented nature of what we were dealing with, we achieved an enormous amount. But there's no question that we were doing it on very sparse resources, and in some cases the capability just wasn't there, in the way that I was just describing for the co—ordination, and in some cases, as on the communications, it just — there just weren't enough of it and it wasn't senior enough. So, you know, it was harder because we didn't have very many people.

But morale was strong and people were extremely collaborative, and they worked, you know, very

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effectively , and I think that spoke to a very positive culture in the department, actually. But the resourcing questions were, you know, very difficult to manage through this period.

And I had a lot of support from my fellow Permanent Secretaries, but I had to spend quite a lot of my time getting it and asking for it. It was quite a lot of what I did in these early days.

9 Q. Now, moving into 18 June, I think we can just continue 10 that theme.

I think on that day, the Sunday, there was, of course, we know, the further taskforce meeting, but is it right that you made some decisions allocating responsibilities, among those of which was to decide that Helen MacNamara and you would continue to lead the overall co—ordination.

17 A. Yes

 $\begin{array}{lll} {\rm 18} & {\rm Q.} & {\rm And~that~Jo~Farrar~would~play~a~significant~role~in} \\ {\rm 19} & & {\rm supporting~Gold~Command}~-- \end{array}$

20 A. Yes

21 Q. — and lead on possible intervention in RBKC, I think.

22 A. Yes

Q. Now, on that day also, which was 18 June, Sunday, is it
 right John Barradell appointed Paul Najsarek — is that

how you pronounce it?

- 1 A. I'm not quite sure, but I think that's pretty close.
- Q. Right -- to co-ordinate the humanitarian assistance 2
- 3 under Gold Command, I think; yes?
- 4 A Yes
- 5 Q. Yes, and Eleanor Kelly to lead on engagement with the community. 6
- 7
- Q. Yes. Was that your idea or was that something that came 8 9 from John Barradell?
- 10 A. It came from John Barradell.
- 11 Q. Okay. And he knew Eleanor Kelly from Southwark.
- 12 A. Yes, I think she was there on Saturday, but she was 13 appointed to that role on the Sunday.
- 14 Q. Did things improve as a result of those decisions you 15
- A. I didn't make the decisions in Gold Command, or are you 16 17 referring to the decisions I made in the department?
- 18 Q. In the department.

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- 19 A. Yes, I think it clarified things as we went into the
- 20 following week, and it was quite important for me to be
- clear with the whole department who was doing what as 22 well, so I sent a wider email explaining some of that,
- 2.3 but it did make a difference.
- 2.4 Q. Now, I think central government didn't provide further 25 communications support at that time. Why is that?

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- 1 A. Well, I think on Saturday and Sunday, there was quite
- 2 a lot of concern in central government that there needed
- 3 to be a stronger face of the response in Kensington and
- Chelsea, that the council weren't providing that, and
- 5 I recall that John Barradell himself was very reluctant
- 6 to be that person or face. I think he wanted to be the
- person who was orchestrating behind the scenes, and
- 8 that's why he appointed Eleanor to be that person.
- 9 That's my recollection. I think that was a good
- 10 decision, actually. And so we were teetering on maybe
- 11 finding somebody who could go and represent the victims
- 12 and be their advocate on the ground, but in the end,
- 13 when Eleanor was appointed, I think there was a sense
- that certainly the recovery was being properly 14
- 15 represented on the ground.
- 16 Ministers did, though, still go themselves a lot to
- 17 the area to speak to people and to speak to families.
- 18 They themselves were also quite present in those
- 19 following days.
- Q. I want to turn next briefly to the TMO. You have been 2.0 21 asked about RBKC and the pan-London arrangements, but 2.2 looking at the TMO.
- 2.3 Do you remember that on 20 June, which was the 2.4
- Tuesday after the fire, John Barradell raised with you 25 concerns about the TMO?

1 A. Yes. I recall that they were raised on the Monday,

- actually
- 3 Q. On the Monday?
- 4 A Mm

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- 5 Q. Do you remember that the concerns included problems with
- heating and hot water in the finger blocks, the walkways 6
 - and other buildings around Grenfell Tower, and problems
- 8 with leadership as well? 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. Do you remember that?
- 11 Can we go to {CLG00005813} and look at the second 12 email down on that page, please, 20 June at 19.10, from 13 Camilla Sheldon to a cast of recipients, including you

14 and Helen MacNamara 15 "A quick read out from COBRA. Main actions for us

in bold. (Melanie/Jillian - [please] shout if I've 17 missed anything)."

18 Then if you look at the second main heading down, 19 "Met Police", and then there is a third main heading,

20 "Support for those affected/Gold command", number 7 21

23 particular) ... 2.4 Then in bold, which is for you:

2.5 "... solution is to get the right people in place -

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"TMO is not reliable (issues around hot water in

[DCLG] will provide update on next steps at PM COBRA 1 2 (Kerry).'

- 3 Yes?
- 4 A. Yes. Q. Now, Kerry, I think, is a reference to Kerry MacHale --5
- 6 A. Kerry MacHale.
- 7 Q. -- not David Kerry, just to be clear.
- 8 A. That's correct.
- 9 The reference to "TMO is not reliable", what did you 10 understand that was a reference to?
- 11 So my understanding is that the leadership of the TMO
- 12 just wasn't working and somehow wasn't managing to
- communicate with residents, wasn't present on the 13
- 14 ground, and that underlying that problem was the fact
- 15 that they still reported in to the council and reported.
- 16 therefore, in through Nicholas Holgate, and that this
- 17 was becoming a real blockage on Monday, because we had
- 18 various $\,--\,$ we had teams of people that we thought, via
- 19 the Homes and Communities Agency and the housing
- 2.0 regulator, that we could send in to support, but -- from
- 21 other areas, but that offer wasn't going to be received
- 2.2 until the leadership changed.

So I recall John Barradell I think ringing me up 23 2.4 about this. He said, "This needs resolving, you have to

25 resolve it, this is about the council not being prepared

1 to take the steps they need to take". He was quite 2 forthright. And in parallel, I think, you know, 3 discussions were going on about Nicholas Holgate's 4 position, and so in the end what happened was that the 5 leader asked Nicholas Holgate to resign, and he stepped aside from his role, and Barry Quirk, who came and took 6 over, acted on the TMO issues as some of the first steps 8 he took on the Wednesday when he arrived. I think it 9 took a while for him to properly resolve them because he 10 wasn't fully in the role until a couple of weeks later. 11 But these issues were all being worked on together, and 12 they were quite sensitive, and that's why this 13 particular $\,$ reference in this email -- there was quite 14 a lot more going on behind the scenes. 15 Q. Was consideration given within the department to taking 16 over the TMO in the same way that John Barradell had 17 taken over RBKC? 18 A. I don't think we would ever have taken it over from the 19 department, but we were certainly giving consideration

> a problem at that point. But, more generally, we were thinking about the council and about whether or not a formal intervention was necessary, whether that could be done

as to how we could, you know, orchestrate a change of

leadership in the TMO, which we understood to be quite

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1 in time, whether it was appropriate. Jo and I had a lot 2 of conversations about that over the weekend. I was 3 more in the camp of: surely we're going to have to intervene, and Jo was, I think quite rightly, saying, 5 "Well, no, actually, Gold Command is dealing with the immediate problem". And in the end, I don't think we 6 did need to intervene. I think Jo was right. We did 8 put in the taskforce a bit later down the line. 9 MR MILLETT: Mr Chairman, can I just finish this topic off? 10 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, that's all right. Yes. 11 MR MILLETT: It's a short document. {CLG00003544}. This is 12 an email string of 19 June, so the Monday, and it is from Alex Powell at DCLG to a number of people within 13 14 the department, copied to you and to the office of the 15 Secretary of State, and Helen MacNamara: 16 "Kerry - thanks for the quick chat just now. As we 17 agreed, it feels right that your note [focuses] on the 18 KCTMO and the powers of the regulator rather than 19 expanding the note to include our Best Value powers to 2.0 inspect and the wider approach to K&C. Let me know ..."

As we see, it comes to you.

Kerry MacHale the same day, 19 June, at 16.40:

"Alec Taylor can hold the ring on ... this advice. 186

you go down to the bottom of the page, page 1, from

Below that is an email at the foot of the screen, if

He's already looked at the Social Housing Regulator's powers relating to LAs. Given the timing this will be really high level options that we will be able to explore further."

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What this is really about emerges on page 2 {CLG00003544/2}, the first main paragraph:

"At today's SoS meeting, Sally picked up an action to explore options for taking over the management of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation."

Then the rest of it is about advice and creative options, things like that.

Did you get to the bottom of whether it was actually possible to take over the TMO or take over management of the TMO, so far at least as this crisis was concerned?

15 A. I'm not sure whether we got to the bottom of that. My 16 understanding is that the powers of the regulator are 17 quite limited now. They were changed some years before 18 Grenfell, so that it's now very hard for the regulator 19 to act in anticipation of a problem, rather than once 2.0 it's already happened. So I think there were issues 21 with the threshold that wouldn't have been reached or 22 would have been difficult to prove. And so, in the end, 23 as Lise-Anne's email, which I think is entirely correct. 2.4 says, the big difficulty was that the council would

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1 pressure, so solving that problem was, in the end, the 2 right answer, which is what happened on the Tuesday.

normally intervene, and they were under a lot of

3 And the council took that decision themselves, but it

was what was needed to unlock the particular issue with 5

6 Q. Right. Did anybody in the department -- did you -- make 7 any steps to speak to the TMO, Robert Black, the chief 8 executive, or --

9 A. I didn't. but I don't know whether others did.

10 MR MILLETT: Right.

Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment? SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Well, I would just like your help on this: what exactly was it that the TMO should have been

doing that it wasn't doing? 14 15 A. Well, my understanding from my conversations with 16 John Barradell was that people had left the finger

17 blocks, but they were beginning to return, and so that 18 was, you know, revealing a problem, that they weren't 19 fit to be habited(sic). Part of that was because the

2.0 boiler was underneath the tower itself, I think. but 21 part of it was that they had been damaged, and so there

were other issues, and there was just no sense that the

23 TMO was present on the ground or actually gripping those 2.4 issues

Now, that was the impression that I was getting from

transcripts@opus2.com 020 4515 2252

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Opus 2 Official Court Reporters

A. It was John Barradell, but -- was part of it, he rang me to, you know, ask us to do something about it. And -but it wasn't just John Barradell. We were picking this up -- I can't remember exactly where from, it may have been coming in through RED channels, but there was 7 definitely an issue about people from those blocks feeling let down and becoming quite vocal about that 8

9 and, you know, clearly not feeling that they were being 10 communicated with adequately.

11 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: And did John Barradell give you any 12 indication whether he'd spoken to Robert Black or anyone 13 else at the TMO?

14 A. I don't recall whether he did or not. I mean, I would 15 have expected him to have spoken to them, but I don't 16

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right. Thank you. 17

18 MR MILLETT: Is that a convenient moment now?

19 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, it is

Right, well, we'll take the break for the afternoon at that point. We'll stop there, we'll come back at 3.40, and as before, please don't discuss your evidence

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23 with anyone. All right? 2.4

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THE WITNESS: Thank you. SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. (Pause)

Thank you, Mr Millett. 3.40 pm, please.

3 (3.23 pm)

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(A short break)

5 (3.40 pm)

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right, on we go. Yes, 6

thank you.

8 Yes, Mr Millett

MR MILLETT: Yes. Can we please next go to {CLG00008750}.

10 This is an email, and if you look, please, at the top,

11 it's an email sent from Louise Morgan to Sajid Javid's 12 office, and the important point is the attachment, "PPS

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GT letter", "In case you want to pick". If we look at the letter, it is at {CLG00005363},

15 and it's a letter addressed to "Robert and John". The 16 John is Barradell, and it comes from Kenny Bowie, who is

17 PPS to the Home Secretary, and it refers to an official

18 visit to the Westway conducted by the Home Secretary and 19

Nick Hurd MP.

2.0 Now, just looking at the front page, it's dated 21 17 June 2017, so the Saturday. Were you aware of this

22 letter? Did you see it at the time?

23 No. I've not seen it before.

2.4 You have never seen it before now? O

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Q. Right. In which case I think there's nothing I think 1 I need to ask you about it. But were you aware at the 2. 3

time of problems at the Westway?

4 A. Yes

5 Q. And can you tell us what kind of problems you were aware

6 of? 7 A. So what I was hearing was -- it's a little bit

8 difficult, to be honest, having read so much about it 9 since, to know what I knew then and what I know now, but

10 what I was hearing at the time was that it was badly

11 organised; that it wasn't clear who was from

12 the council; that it just wasn't well set up, and didn't

13 provide the kind of private spaces that you would have

expected for people to have quite difficult and 14

15 traumatic conversations about what they needed: that

16 people didn't feel they had access to local services

17 that was clear or, indeed, to central government

18 services. So just that it wasn't set up properly and

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wasn't proving to be supportive to people.

2.0 Q. Did you hear that there had been a feeling that people 21 in hotels were out of sight, out of mind, and had been

ignored by the council having been put in hotels? Was

23 that something that came through to you?

2.4 I certainly remember, particularly as we went into the

25 following week, that people in hotels felt that they

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- hadn't had any contact from the council, and that they
 weren't quite sure who to go to for support.
 - Q. Did that improve at any point?
- 4 A. I remember it being a problem for quite some time, and 5 I also remember, some weeks after the fire, there being an issue with people's -- with the deal that had been 6 7 struck with the hotel for them to stay in those rooms 8 suddenly coming to an end and there being uncertainty 9 about whether they were able to stay. So the question 10 of the hotels and whether they were really working for 11 the families and the fact that they weren't working for 12 many of the families was an issue for some time.
- Q. Now, let's turn to a different topic, perhaps scrolling
 back in time a little bit to Friday, 16 June, and that's
 the victim support unit.

Can we start with your first statement, please, paragraph 66 at page 21 {CLG00030653/21}. If we look at the penultimate bullet point on that page, it says:

"To form a new integrated support service for the Grenfell victims \ldots "

And that was what had been agreed at the Grenfell Tower recovery taskforce meeting at 1.30 on that day; yes?

24 A. Yes.

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25 Q. So let's read it together:

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"To form a new integrated support service for the Grenfell victims, providing a single point of access into Central Government services for those who needed it. This action was assigned to Jillian Kay following a discussion with the Home Office about which department should take charge. By the end of the day a 20-strong team of operational staff from HMRC had been identified to form the new Victims Unit, led by Suzanne Kochanowski, and arrangements had been made for them to start their work on Saturday morning."

Now, is it right that Jillian Kay and
Suzanne Kochanowski in the event did lead on that
initiative?

14 A. Yes, and indeed they led the victims unit for several 15 years between them.

16 Q. Right.

Now, Jillian Kay in her statement, at page 9 {CLG00030430/9}, paragraph 38, says that they had a meeting with the civil contingencies secretariat to discuss that initiative at 5 o'clock in the evening of 16 June. Is that something you know about?

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22 A. Yes, I'm aware that that took place.

23 Q. Right. You weren't there?

24 A. No

25 Q. Right.

Now, did you know that at the meeting it was agreed that the victims unit would be a single integrated

3 service, modelled on the victims of terrorism unit?

4 A. Yes.

Q. And would provide a single point of contact to enable
 those affected by a major incident to access government
 services directly?

8 A. Yes

9 Q. And is it right also that there were representatives 10 from the victims of terrorism unit on the call or at the 11 meeting to explain how it worked?

12 A. Yes.

 ${\tt 13}$ Q. Then I think HMRC provided 20 members of staff as part of their surge team.

15 A. Yes

16 Q. I think that's how it was staffed, was it?

17 A. That's right, initially . On Saturday morning they 18 arrived .

19 Q. Why HMRC?

A. Well, some years earlier, surge arrangements had been
 put in place in the civil service in order to support

departments who had a sudden need for administrative
staff that they couldn't cater for, and HMRC have a lot

of administrative staff and the sort of flexibility that

25 could allow them to support events for, you know, weeks

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or days, and this was felt to be something that they could help with. So this was a cross—civil service resource that was being mobilised by HMRC.

4 Q. I see

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Now, can we go to {CLG00030529}. This is a paper drafted, I think, by Jillian Kay, as she says in her statement, about the scope and the purpose of the victims support unit, or "Victims Unit: Grenfell Tower", and it says that the unit would be, as it says, quoting from paragraph 1:

"... a single integrated support service (following the model of the Victims of Terrorism Unit) to coordinate cross—government activity and provide those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire with a single point of access into central government."

Then it goes on with some details.

17 Did you have any input into this paper?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Did you see it at the time?

20 A. I don't think so, no.

Q. If we go to paragraph 5, you can see the objectives
 under the heading, "Terms of reference", and there are
 three of them:

"• Ensure effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated
 HMG support to victims of the Grenfell Tower fire.

". Engender public confidence, including key interested parties, in HMG's support for victims.

" • Ensure effective working alongside local authority and third sector response."

Then under "Key Deliverables", it says:

- " A single point of access to HMG support through a dedicated phone line.
- "• Victim centred caseworking team, with access to expertise from key Government Departments: DWP, Home Office, DFE, MoJ, HMRC, DH,'

Was this as you understood it, in other words the objectives and the key deliverables?

A. Yes. I think on the Friday afternoon there wasn't complete clarity about exactly how it would work, and, in the end, the -- there were layers of support that were provided, is the way I would describe it. There was a decision taken by Gold Command. I think on the Sunday, that they needed caseworkers as part of Gold for all of the families and those affected, and so at that point I think it became clearer that the central government victim support should be via those caseworkers, rather than direct to families, is my understanding, and that seems to me quite sensible, but everybody was piecing together the different pieces of the jigsaw on the Saturday and Sunday.

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1 The other layer that was put in was that departments 2 were also asked by the Cabinet Office, I understand, to 3 send people directly to the Westway, which they did, 4 I believe, from Monday.

5 Q. Yes

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- A. So, actually, they were able to field quite a lot of the 6 7 enquiries directly themselves. I'm not sure that worked 8 terribly well for the first few days, but they did 9 actually, you know, field quite a few enquiries. So 10 there was less need, in the end, for the victim support 11 unit with the HMRC volunteers.
- 12 Q. Well, I think you have cut, perhaps, to the chase with 13 that. I was leading up more gently to it. But in the 14 end, I think it's right, isn't it, that there wasn't, 15 first of all, a specific practised emergency plan in setting up a victim support unit; you had to borrow from 16 17 the terrorist experience?
- 18 A. Yes, that's right.
- 19 Q. Yes. I think it's also right that the usefulness of the 2.0 unit became eroded into something of a sweeper function, 21 according to some of the later emails: ves? Is that how 2.2 you understood it?
- 23 A. I'm not sure I'd describe it as a sweeper function, but 2.4 it was for -- I think they were able to field some 25 enquiries, particularly where they couldn't be resolved

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easily on the ground and somebody needed to go back into 2 the department and liaise. But I agree with you, 3 I don't think there was a clear plan, and it's not clear 4 to me which department should have been responsible for 5 holding that preparation either, because this was, in the end, a Home Office unit, from which, as you say, we 6 7 borrowed, and I think, to be honest, that was very 8 effective, that that meeting was called so quickly on 9 Friday afternoon so that the learning could be had and 10 they could discuss what worked. But, in an ideal world 11 you would have a bit more of a menu of options that was 12 pre-prepared and then you could think about what was going to be useful in the circumstances. 13

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Do you also recall that there was a confusion among departments and agencies about what the victim support unit would do and what the Red Cross phone line would do? Do vou remember that?

- 19 A. I don't particularly remember the confusion with the 20 Red Cross, no. I remember the confusion between the 21 victims unit and the people at the Westway.
- 2.2 Q. Right.

Well, let's go then to {CLG00020610}, just to pick up on that point. This is an internal DCLG email of 18 June at 15.11, 3.11, from -- it's impossible to find

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it, but it is from the office of Sajid Javid to his own office, copied to lots of people, including Alok Sharma's office, your office, RED and others, and

it says in the first bold, in yellow: 5 "First and foremost - SofS said a huge thank you to 6 all those involved in this effort. He is incredibly

grateful for all the work being done in the Department." Then if you go to page 2 $\{CLG00020610/2\}$, please, the particular point to pick up at page 2 is in the

"On the ground support

third paragraph down:

" • [Secretary of State] wants there to be better coordination - e.g. one number for people on the ground to phone for support. Katherine M advised that Red Cross is providing this service. Gold command will be announcing this today.

17 " - ACTION: please can SofS get an update on this." 18 The question I have is this: was the Red Cross, first of all, providing that service, a phone line

19 2.0 service?

A. I believe they were, but that was a decision that was 2.2 for Gold Command, and I believe they were, yes. I think 23 there was some confusion about the phone number as well,

2.4 but --

2.5 Q. Right.

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A. But this was evolving. And if I can just comment on this, I think you can see here that I think the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister and others were very keen for there to be civil service visible support on the ground, with tabards and lanvards and so on, and those who were experienced in emergency response, including John Barradell and others, and also Jo Farrar, were very clear that that would not be a very good idea, that civil servants don't really have the expertise to engage directly with people in these sorts of circumstances, that they could easily get things wrong, and they simply weren't trained to do it, and that instead, making sure the administrative support was there behind the scenes to respond to events, ideally through a caseworker system, which wasn't in place until early in the following week, that that was the right solution.

But we were muddling through a bit during these days, I think, with some difference in what ministers wanted to happen and what I think in the end turned out to be exactly the right thing to happen. So you can see that -- I can see that in this email, that tension, that we eventually worked through. But I think, you know, more advanced preparation would have made it easier for ministers to make chooses and understand exactly what it

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was that they were choosing.

Q. Yes. Yes, thank you.

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Finally on the question of the victim support unit, I think you would agree that, in the end, the unit provided very little benefit to the overall response.

A. I don't know. I'm not sure what it did in the rest of that following week, because I haven't looked at any of the documents beyond the Tuesday on this — that's Tuesday the 20th — but, in the end, it seems to me that quite a lot of the enquiries that people had were resolved relatively straightforwardly. They were things like driving licences and so on. Some of the issues around benefits and immigration status and so on took longer, but, again, needed more specialist support that a more generic victims unit wasn't really able to help with anyway.

So, yes, I'm not sure it turned out to be quite the right fit , but I —— you know, I would say, in a crisis like this , better to start and to try and to have a go and then adapt it as you go along than to spend a really long time working out a perfect solution that then isn't implemented. So, you know, Suzanne and Jillian had a go, put something in place, and then it needed to be adapted.

Q. Can I then turn to changes since the fire, and pick this

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up at page 37 of your first statement {CLG00030653/37}, paragraph 122. You say there:

"Since the fire , improvements have been made to London Local Government Resilience arrangements, following a peer challenge which reported in early 2018. This recommended that London Councils strengthen the Gold Command resolution to 'make triggers and the escalation process clearer, so that there is a clear mandated process in the extreme circumstances that demand it'. This greater transparency of process and expectation seems to me to be a key conclusion in the light of Grenfell. An important role for Central Government is to work with and support all local areas to ensure that these arrangements are in place."

What were the improvements made to the London local government resilience arrangements that are referred to here by you following the Grenfell Tower fire?

A. They are the ones that were set out in the report by Tom Riordan and Mary Ney, and my understanding is that the key thing was to improve the trigger through which wider resilience support is provided to an individual council and to reduce the reliance on the council themselves asking for help. But I'll be honest with you, I looked back at that report as part of my preparations for this hearing, and I couldn't quite

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1 myself see the clarity of recommendation. But that's my 2 understanding of what's been done.

Q. Indeed

What I wanted just to ask you about with a little bit more focus is this: when you say, "This greater transparency of process and expectation seems to me to be a key conclusion in the light of Grenfell", what did you mean by that?

A. Well, I think the key problem on the Wednesday morning is that the council didn't seek to mobilise the support it could have had from other boroughs across London through the London Resilience arrangements, and so that, for me, raises questions of process and expectation and trigger points and decision points, and I don't quite know what the right answer is here. I think it's very difficult, because of what I say in the end of the previous paragraph, actually, that you don't want central government or indeed really anyone else to cut across local command structures, but when those structures are not working, you have to know who acts, the basis on which they act, the information they gather in order to act, and whose responsibility it is to check. So that's the piece that was missing. And I think it was left to the council alone, we were all relying on that, it didn't happen, and we were all --

1	not just central government or DCLG, by the way, I think	1	think I should ask you.
2	also London Resilience need to understand, you know,	2	So what I'm going to do is ask the Chairman to take
3	what they could have done more. They didn't ring us	3	the usual break at this stage and see if there are such
4	either on that Wednesday and Thursday.	4	questions.
5	So I feel that there is a collective sense in which	5	SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes.
6	somehow the system needs to mobilise to act in	6	Well, as you know from your previous experience with
7	a situation like that that didn't happen after Grenfell.	7	us, we have a break at this stage to see whether there
8	But I don't think this is straightforward, because you	8	are more questions we ought to ask you. So we'll stop
9	could go in and be too overbearing of a council that was	9	now.
LO	actually doing a good job, and that could create	10	Do you think ten minutes is enough, Mr Millett?
L1	problems itself.	11	MR MILLETT: I do.
L2	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Well, I was going to ask you: is it	12	SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: If I say 4.10, then you can alway
L3	your understanding that the improvements to which you	13	tell us if you need more time.
L4	refer in paragraph 122 do give someone some overriding	14	MR MILLETT: That'd be helpful, thank you.
L5	power to act without the consent of the local authority?	15	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: We'll say 4.10. It might be a bi
L6	A. I'm not sure they do go that far, not to act without the	16	longer, but we'll try and get you back as soon as we
L7	consent, and indeed there was consent by the local	17	can. All right?
L8	authority for the arrangements that were put in place	18	THE WITNESS: Thank you.
L9	after Grenfell . No.	19	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much.
20	SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right. Thank you.	20	(Pause)
21	A. But whether you need something without their consent or	21	Thank you, Mr Millett. 4.10, unless you tell us
22	whether, in the end, enough pressure can be put to bear,	22	that you need more time.
23	you know, amongst officers and elected councillors	23	MR MILLETT: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.
24	together for them to realise they need to do something	24	SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much.
25	differently $$ that was $$ in the end, it was enough	25	(4.03 pm)
	205		207
1	here. But I —— you know, will it always be enough?	1	(A short break)
2	MR MILLETT: In that last answer but one you referred to	2	(4.10 pm)
3	London Resilience needing to understand that they could	3	SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right. Well, we'll see if there
4	have done more. To whom are you referring when you say	4	are any more questions.
5	London Resilience?	5	Yes, Mr Millett.
6	A. Well, I mean the London Gold arrangements. So, I'm	6	MR MILLETT: Yes, Mr Chairman. Just one or two.
7	sorry, my recollection of this is a bit rusty anyway,	7	Now, you told us this morning that you I think had
8	but, you know, what could have happened on the day is	8	had past experience that local authorities had, as you
9	that a rotating Gold structure could have been put in	9	say, been pretty good at dealing with temporary crises.
L O	place, and the individuals, ironically, were actually	10	That was your experience.
L1	there supporting Nicholas Holgate, it's just that they	11	Now, can I show you a document, {HOM00042998},
L2	weren't operating in that way, and that system of	12	please. Now, this is a document entitled "Civil
L3	a rotating set of chief executives actually leading	13	contingencies: role of the local tier". Do you see
L4	Gold $$ the system was there and, indeed, some of the	14	that?
L5	capabilities, such as humanitarian support, were there	15	A. Yes.
L6	and quite well rehearsed, and they weren't called upon.	16	Q. Is it a document you've ever seen before?
L7	Q. So you mean the duty Golds?	17	A. I don't believe so, no, but I can see that it's dated
L8	A. The duty Golds, yes.	18	January 2015.
9	Q. I follow.	19	Q. Yes.
20	A. That's what I mean.	20	A. So just before I came to DCLG, so I may not have seen it
1	MR MILLETT: Thank you	2.1	when Larrived

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Q. It is. It is.

on page 2, it says:

If you go to page 2 {HOM00042998/2}, and look at C

 ${\rm "Changes}\ {\rm to}\ {\rm service}\ {\rm models},\ {\rm whether}\ {\rm through}\ {\rm budget}$

Opus 2
Official Court Reporters

Dame Melanie, you will be pleased to know that

I have come to the end of my questions that I wanted to

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ask you, but there may be others that I haven't which

are in $\,$ my note and there may be others which others

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pressures or policy decisions, may also lead to reduced resilience of specific services, which may become a burden for government. For example provision of home—based social care through private providers ..."

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"A reduction in local authority and responder organisation resilience and emergency capacity may create significant additional financial cost for the government. For example, local emergencies are likely to trigger the 'overwhelm' subsidiarity criteria prompting central government intervention sooner, causing a greater proportion of the costs of responding to local emergencies to be transferred to central government."

Is that something that you were aware of when you came in to the department?

- A. I was certainly aware of the reduction in local authority resourcing. I think it was about 25% in real terms over the preceding five years before I arrived, and that had had an impact, no question. I wasn't aware of this particular document pointing to the risks that that could create for resilience and emergency capacity.
- 23 Q. If you go, please, to page 4 {HOM00042998/4}, there's a guestion at the top:
- "Is the current model fit—for—purpose out to 2020?"

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Beneath that is a spider's web, perhaps unsurprisingly, of what it's supposed to look like, and it's a figure illustrating the decline, it is said, in local tier emergency planning and response that will take place if the model is not adapted.

It goes on to say:

"Out to 2020, the current model may not be fit—for—purpose and a failure to adapt to the 2020 context may degrade the ability of the local tier to conduct emergency planning and response. This model can continue to be relied upon to deliver outputs, but the additional risk that will be accepted as a result must be articulated and understood."

Is that a problem or a question or topic which you were aware of at any time after January 2015, and particularly when you joined the department in 2016?

- A. No, I wasn't, and I wasn't aware of this document.

 I think it's a very interesting document. Of course, we didn't have any role in DCLG in overseeing whether or not that local resilience and emergencies planning was actually adequate, we didn't have an assurance role, and I think that's changed. I think it was a gap in the system. But, you know, I can see here being identified quite a lot of potential risks.
- Q. When you say, "We didn't have an assurance role", do you

1 mean DCLG?

- A. DCLG didn't, no, through RED is what I mean.
- Q. I see. But central government did through the Cabinet Office or the CCS, or is that not right?

Cabinet Office or the CCS, or is that not right?
 A. I don't believe that they had a role or that anyone had

- a role from central government in assuring individual plans and making sure that they were adequate. That's what I meant when I said assurance.
- 9 Q. But did anyone in central government have some kind of 10 assurance role or oversight role about the structure and 11 fitness for purpose of the contingency framework, the 12 national contingency framework?
- 13 A. Oh, the national contingency framework, that would have 14 been the Cabinet Office.
- 15 Q. Yes, thank you. Well, thank you very much for that. 16 So that leads me to one final question, which is 17 a question I know you have been asked before in 18 a different context in a different module, but it's 19 this: looking back on the events of the period 20 immediately following the Grenfell Tower fire on and 21 from 14 June 2017, and looking in particular at all the 22 material, the disparate range of material, we have 23 covered during the course of your evidence today and 2.4 your own particular role, is there anything, looking

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back on it, that you would have done differently?

A. Well, I'd just like to say I —— you know, I just deeply regret the fact that, you know, families, residents and a local community who had experienced such a devastating fire and the impact of that then did not get the support that they needed and should have deserved, did deserve, straight after the fire, and I think the mistakes that were made in the way that the response was organised, and particularly the way the humanitarian response was available in the first hours after the fire, took too long for us all to realise, and then, once we had realised that the problems were there, it inevitably, I think, took quite a long time to sort and correct through the Gold Command structures.

So when I look back and think about what we could have done differently, as I've said a number of times today, I wish that Jo Farrar and I in particular had thought to check that the London Gold arrangements were there and that they were operating in the way that I think it was obvious was going to be needed at the beginning, and that we just assumed were there, and I wish we'd checked that, because that might have had an impact in accelerating the improvement that came later, but too late. So that's my first reflection.

But I would like to say that I do believe it's incredibly important that the principle of a locally—led

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response is preserved here. When I read all the witness statements, and particularly those from Rugby Portobello and the Clement James Centre, I was just struck once again about how local relationships and understanding of the community need to be very, very central, and it was the failure to brigade those that is such a shame, because it was there and actually was effective, but just was never quite harnessed and led and used by the council in the way that it could have been. So I do believe locally -led responses are right, and I think central government should be very, very careful about stepping in to things it doesn't have the experience of or really know how to sort out.

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My second reflection is one we touched on this morning. I don't think that the distinction between response and recovery and the planning in particular for recovery helped us in the response to Grenfell Tower. The Home Office was the lead government department, but I think we assumed that mantle very quickly from DCLG for response and recovery. I think the distinction between the response and recovery issues wasn't really there, it was just a question of time, and I feel that, you know, if we had done more preparation as a department, but actually also if it had been clearer in the way that the central government systems and

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decisions operated that we would have been put in that place more obviously, more quickly, I think we could have improved the way that we gripped all this.

In addition, I still stand by the comment I made in my first witness statement that I think a Cabinet-level meeting on that first day would also have accelerated the sense of urgency and grip and everybody coming together that was achieved later in the week.

So I think there are a number of reflections there really for the overall resilience and emergency planning structures and the way that they're organised and the roles of departments that I think we were sort of working around to the best of our ability, but slightly with one arm behind our back.

Then my final reflection is that I think -- and again, I think this is something for the Cabinet Office to lead -- I think it would help central government to be clearer about the offers that it makes in scenarios like this, to be clearer about the types of victim support that can be useful in different scenarios. to map more comprehensively the sorts of things that central government departments might or might not be asked to do, so that there is a clearer sense of what is available to ministers, which I think would speed up their decisions. As I was saying just before the last

break, I think there was some confusion about what the victims unit was, what ministers had asked for, what ultimately was appropriate to deliver, and, again, I think those things slowed us down and were confusing. I think it was irritating and confusing for ministers, and I think it was quite hard for officials to act on things in that slight vacuum of understanding of what is there to be done.

9 So I think the Cabinet Office has actually done 10 quite a lot of work on this, they did a big review in 11 the autumn of 2017, but I'm not clear myself exactly 12 what was actioned, and those are the two things that 13 I would particularly flag that I think could be 14 deserving of further investigation.

MR MILLETT: Well, Dame Melanie, thank you very much for that answer, and indeed for all of your evidence. We are extremely grateful to you for coming here to the Inquiry for the second time and assisting us with our investigations, so it only remains for me to say thank you very much. Thank you.

21 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much.

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: It also remains, of course, for me 22 to thank you very much on behalf of the panel. There 23 2.4 aren't all that many people who've come more than once

2.5 to give evidence to the Inquiry, and we are particularly

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1 grateful to you for giving up the time to come for 2 a second time. I need hardly say that we have learned 3 a lot from hearing your evidence, and we're very

grateful to you for being here. So thank you very much.

And, of course, you're now free to go.

6 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

7 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew)

9 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, Mr Millett. Now ...

10 MR MILLETT: That concludes the oral evidence for this

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12 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes.

MR MILLETT: There are further witness statements which we 13 need to read into the Inquiry's record. 14

15 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes.

16 MR MILLETT: Those are to be found in two parts. There are, 17 first, {IDX0933}, which is a reference under which the 18 witness statements from government and other like 19

organisations will be found, including RBKC.

2.0 There is a second and separate Module 4 list, which 21 is the BSR statements, and those are to be found 2.2 compendiously under {IDX0932}. There are large numbers 23 of statements in both groups, and each of them has their 2.4 own IWS number, or CAB or RBK, as the case may be, and

25 they can be read there.

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            So they are to be taken now as in the record and
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         publicly available.
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     SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.
     \label{eq:mr} \mbox{MR MILLETT: } \mbox{ Mr Chairman, that brings us, then, formally to}
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         the end of the factual evidence -- indeed, all the \,
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 6
         evidence -- for Module 4.
     SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you.
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            Well, at that point we shall break off the hearings.
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         We are not going to sit next week. There will be no
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         hearings next week. But on 6 June, we shall embark on
         Module 7, and Module 7 will involve hearing expert
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         evidence from a variety of witnesses relating to matters
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         that have already been touched on in the course of
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         the Inquiry, but on which we have not had the benefit of
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         their views yet.
     MR MILLETT: That's right.
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     SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: So we adjourn now, and we resume at
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         10 o'clock on 6 June.
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     MR MILLETT: Yes. Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you,
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         members of the panel.
     SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.
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     (4.24 pm)
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                 (The hearing adjourned until 10 am
24
                     on Monday, 6 June 2022)
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