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Grenfell Tower Inquiry

Day 272

May 4, 2022

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1 Wednesday, 4 May 2022 1 12 March 2020. Again, could you confirm that is your 2. (10.00 am) 2. statement, please, and signature? SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to A. Yes. I can. 4 Q. You have had the opportunity, I understand, to read 4 today's hearing. Today we're going to hear another 5 witness from the RBKC. 5 those statements recently; is that correct? 6 Yes, Mr Keating. 6 A. That's correct. 7 MR KEATING: Good morning, Mr Chairman. Good morning, 7 Q. Can you confirm that the contents of those statements 8 8 are true to the best of your belief and understanding? members of the panel. 9 Could I call Laura Johnson, please. 9 A. Yes. I can. 10 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you. 10 Q. Thank you. 11 MS LAURA JOHNSON (affirmed) 11 Background, if we could deal with that briefly, SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. Please sit 12 12 Ms Johnson. 13 down and make yourself comfortable. 13 Can you confirm that you have worked in housing for 14 14 (Pause) local authorities and housing associations for over 15 Yes, Mr Keating. 15 20 years, and a significant proportion of that time has MR KEATING: Thank you. 16 16 been working in London for a number of local 17 Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY 17 authorities? 18 MR KEATING: Ms Johnson, welcome back to the Inquiry. 18 A. That's correct 19 Thank you again for attending the Inquiry to assist with 19 Q. Is it right that you joined RBKC in February 2009, 20 20 our investigations and by giving evidence. initially as a secondee, and you became a permanent 21 Just a few introductory matters, and matters which 21 employee as director of housing in 2010? 22 no doubt you are familiar with from your last attendance 22 A. That's correct. 2.3 at the Inquiry, but firstly, could I invite you to keep 23 Q. And you held that position up until June 2017, as of 2.4 2.4 June 2017 your voice up so that the transcriber, who sits to your 25 2.5 A. As of July 2017. right, can capture what you say. Also in that vein, if 3 1 you could avoid nodding or shaking your head, as that 1 Q. Thank you. And you no longer are with RBKC; is that 2 won't be picked up by the transcript. 2 correct? 3 If you have difficulty in answering or understanding 3 A. That's correct. 4 any of my questions, just let me know, and I'm sure it's 4 Q. So during that period, over seven years you were working 5 5 my fault and I can rephrase it. at RBKC -- in fact, eight years -- in the role as Lastly, at any stage if you need a break, do let us 6 director of housing, could you assist us with what that 7 know. We will take a break mid-morning and role entailed? 8 mid-afternoon. 8 A. Yes. My responsibilities covered homelessness and Is that okay? 9 9 housing advice, housing finance, housing regeneration 10 A. That's fine. 10 and housing development, and the relationship --Q. A few formal matters. managing the relationship with RBK -- K&CTMO. 11 11 12 You have provided a number of statements to this 12 Q. Okay. So you mentioned four departments which you were 13 Inquiry, and specifically in relation to the aftermath 13 responsible for managing, and is it right that you had 14 module you have provided two statements which we're just 14 a team of around 120 people? 15 going to look at and identify. 15 A. That's correct. 16 If we could return to $\{RBK00035592\}$, please, we see 16 Q. As of June 2017, was your line manager 17 17 the front page. That's your first statement. Nicholas Holgate --18 If we could turn to page 26, please, it's dated 18 A. That's correct. 19 26 January 2019, and could you confirm that's your 19 -- the town clerk/chief executive of RBKC? 20 signature? 20 A. That's correct. 2.1 A. Yes. I can. 21 Q. I'm going to turn to your role in an emergency. Okay? Q. Thank you. 2.2 2.2 Let's deal with plans first . 23 Your second statement is at {RBK00057957}. That's 23 Were you familiar with the RBKC emergency plan, which is known as the contingency management plan? 24 the front page of your second witness statement, and if 24 25 you could turn to page 6, please, it's dated 25 A. Yes, I had read that plan.

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Q. I wonder if you could assist us in clarifying some matters around other possible plans, please, which you touch upon in your statement.

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If we could turn to your second witness statement $\{RBK00057957\}$, please, at page 1, and if we focus at the bottom of page 1, there's a question there that you were asked by the Inquiry:

"Please provide a copy of the housing resilience plan referred to at paragraph 10 of your [first] statement "

We can see the answer overleaf at the top of page 2 {RBK00057957/2}, and your answer is this:

"I gave an incorrect name in paragraph 10 of my first statement, the resilience plan as referenced was actually called the Business Continuity Plan. The Business Continuity Plan was updated electronically. We reviewed the escalations for incidents with the Kensington and Chelsea [TMO] ... following the Adair fire and the plan was updated accordingly."

And you were unable to obtain a paper copy of this

I will return to Adair and the lessons in relation to that in a moment, but can you assist, how did the business and continuity plan interact, if at all, with the contingency management plan in an emergency?

- 1 A. So it was my understanding that we had a business 2 continuity plan that was asked to be produced by --3 corporately by the emergency planning team. I cannot, to be honest with you, remember how often we updated it 5 or how regularly it was updated. But it was a corporate request that the housing department, and indeed all 6 7 departments of the council, have a continuity plan and, 8 therefore, it would interact with the central emergency 9 plan.
- 10 Q. Was that an internal plan, in other words internally how 11 you would operate in an emergency if there was some 12 difficulty, or was it external?
- 13 A. It was an internal plan. It was a plan produced by the 14 housing department that set out how we would respond in 15 the case of an emergency.
- 16 Q. Okay.

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The second area for clarification relates to the existence of a housing contingency plan, and your former colleague Veneeze Augustine -- she was an RBKC homelessness team manager -- refers to this in her statement to the Inquiry. Perhaps we could look at that. That's {RBK00035411/2} at paragraph 7, please.

Okay, so this is her statement, and she's asked a question about policies, procedures and plans, and she says this:

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"During emergencies the Borough's response is coordinated through the Borough Emergency Control Centre ... There is a specific written policy setting out what to do in an emergency for several departments, including the housing department."

She produces a copy of this document, the housing contingency plan, date of issue July 2012.

We have a reference to that if it assists you to look at it, but was there such a document in place as of June 2017, a housing contingency plan?

11 A. If it was the one from July 2012, that would have been 12 the one that was in place, but I don't remember doing 13 one more recently up until June 2017.

14 Q. Well, let's assist you by opening that document up. 15 It's {RBK00035406}, please. So we can identify it from 16 page 1:

"Housing

18 "Contingency Plan

"For Emergencies and Business Continuity

20 Disruptions."

At page 1.

If we scroll down to page 2 $\{RBK00035406/2\},$ we can 22 23 see the date at the bottom, "Issue No. 1", and that's 2.4

2.5 Perhaps we could go to page 5 {RBK00035406/5},

please, and paragraph 1.2, "Aim": 1

"The aim of the Housing Contingency Plan is to:

" • Support, and expand on, the RBKC Contingency Management Plan ..."

If we look at 1.4, please, which is at the bottom of that page, "Training and Exercising":

"This Plan will be exercised at least once annually to ensure it delivers an efficient and effective

9 response to emergencies from the Housing Department." 10

It mentions:

"'Introduction to Contingency Management' training is available through the Council's Student Centre Training shall be offered for key staff with managerial responsibilities in the employment of this plan.

15 "All new staff inductions will include an 16 explanation of Housing's Contingency Plan ..."

17 Just in relation to that at the moment, does this 18 assist your recollection? Was this plan or this type of 19 plan in existence in the housing department as of

2.0 June 2017?

21 A. If there was one in existence, then if there isn't 2.2 an updated copy from July 2012, then it was likely that 23 this copy was the one that was in existence at the time 2.4 of June 2017.

25 Q. And do you recall exercising a plan like this once

1 annually to ensure it delivers an efficient and something I needed to do on an annual basis in order to 2 effective response to emergencies from the housing 2 keep this plan and the training of my team up to date on 3 department? 3 that basis. 4 A No 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right. Well, that's very helpful. Thank you very much. 5 Q. How comfortable or confident are you now, looking back, 5 as to whether this sort of plan was being utilised or Yes, Mr Keating. 6 6 7 there was awareness of this back in June 2017? 7 MR KEATING: Thank you. Just following on from the question from A. I'm not confident that it was utilised and/or that the 8 8 9 wider housing staff team were aware of it in June 2017. 9 the Chairman, in relation to 1.4, it says: 10 1.0 Q. And can you say why that was, that it wasn't being "Training shall be offered for key staff with 11 utilised or there wasn't that knowledge in relation to 11 managerial responsibilities in the employment of this 12 12 it? plan. 13 A. It was something that we were asked to do corporately. 13 In relation to training, perhaps you could assist 14 14 It would be my expectation that there would be with your training in relation to the contingency 15 a corporate directive that it was updated on an annual 15 management plan: did you have any specific training? 16 16 A. I had attended a training event in 2015 that was put on basis. That doesn't excuse the fact, as director of 17 housing, that I also should have prompted to have it 17 by the emergency planning team, but I didn't have any 18 updated on an annual basis, and I didn't. 18 other formal training on contingency management 19 So emergency planning I viewed at that time as being 19 2.0 as part of a large corporate organisation that would be 20 Q. Okay 21 something that I would be asked to do or instructed to 21 Whilst we have this document open, let's deal with 22 do by the corporate centre, and therefore $\ensuremath{\mathsf{I}}$ would then 22 1.7, please, which is the following page, page 6 23 2.3 {RBK00035406/6}, and it says this: organise it on a departmental basis, but I did not take 2.4 responsibility myself for ensuring that was in place on 2.4 "Relationships with Other Partners." 25 an annual basis. 2.5 It talks about the housing department delivering 9 1 Q. So we talked about the internal housing department plan; 1 front-line services: in relation to the wider RBKC contingency management "This covers the following the TMO, Registered 2 2 3 plan, you said that you were aware of that. 3 Providers (formerly known as Housing Associations) ..." A. Yes. I was. Moving on to the next sentence: Q. In relation to your staff, what was your view as to 5 5 "All of these partners have their own emergency 6 planning procedures in place but may call upon the 6 awareness of the contingency management plan back in 7 7 June 2017? Council for further assistance, and Housing Staff should 8 8

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A. I don't know if my staff were aware of it. I -- itwould have been available on the council's intranet, and there would have been advice and information available about it, but I am not aware of the information that my staff would have had about the contingency plan.

13 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Can you just help me with this: were 14 you yourself conscious of what's said in paragraph 1.4?

15 A. Not at June 2017, no.

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16 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Well, I'm thinking of the years leading up to June 2017. What I'd really welcome your 17 18 help on is whether you were aware that there was this 19 plan which included a provision that it should be 2.0 exercised annually. 21

A. I was aware of the plan, but I wasn't familiar enough with it to know that there was a provision in there at 1.4 that this needed to be exercised annually. So it was drafted. I read it . and then I didn't revisit it . So, no, I didn't take it on board that there was

consult this document in responding to any requests for assistance.'

I'm just going to move on to page 7 {RBK00035406/7},

"The following type of scenario [a major emergency] may occur in Housing and require staff to implement contingency planning."

It talks about local residents needing to be decanted on an emergency basis due to fire, gas leak, major service failure.

"In this type of scenario Registered Providers, Supported Housing Providers and the TMO will be expected to follow their own emergency procedures, which will include the following types of responses ... '

It sets out the responses there: attending the site; alerts to the council's contingency planning team:

"Where tenants/service users need to be decanted:

" • People should be advised to say with

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1 families / friends. 2

" • B&Bs/hotels can be booked.

"• Emergency rest centres can be made available ...'

Was that your understanding of the position as at June 2017?

A. Yes, it was. 6

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7 Q. You mention in your first statement, which we don't need to look at, at paragraph 13 $\{RBK00035592/4\}$ that the 8 9 housing department learned a great deal from what had 10 and had not worked with regard to emergency planning as 11 a result of the Adair Tower fire which took place on 12 31 October 2015; is that correct?

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Q. You say your department, led by Amanda Johnson, had 14 15 a meeting with David Kerry and the TMO to review 16 procedure and improve practice in April 2016; is that 17 correct?

18 A. That's correct.

Q. There are a couple of aspects of the minutes of that 19 20 meeting which perhaps you could assist us upon, and 2.1 they're at {RBK00004660}.

> So this is the meeting on 11 April 2016, the follow-up on the Adair Tower fire. You're not an attendee. firstly . in relation to that, so you weren't at this meeting, but it may be that you were

made aware of the contents of this minute in due course. Perhaps if we look at this, it may assist your recollection

If we look at page 2 {RBK00004660/2}, please, and under "Call-out of the Housing Department", in the middle of the page, second bullet point:

"We have agreed that any significant incident involving RBKC (TMO managed) properties will include an alert to directly to [sic] Housing senior management."

In other words, that housing will be alerted straight away.

If we turn to the second bullet point at page 3 {RBK00004660/3}, please:

"Housing confirmed that -

". They can liaise with TMO to get full details of vulnerable evacuated tenants.'

So in relation to the first point, you mention that in your statement, that was a lesson learned, that housing needs to be informed if there's a major incident --

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2.2 A. Yes.

23 $Q. \ \ --$ and there's people who have been displaced or 2.4 decanted, to use the phraseology we've heard, from the 25 properties; is that correct?

A. That's correct.

vulnerable or not.

2 Q. In relation to this matter we just looked at about 3 getting details of vulnerable evacuated tenants from the

4 TMO, was that the case? Was that what would happen?

5 A. Yes, because the TMO were the organisation that had the information about the tenants who lived in any 6 7 particular property. We didn't have that information at the council. So they would be our first port of call to 8 9 ask who lived in the property and did they have any 10 additional information on them, about whether they were

The TMO may not have that information, because obviously it's up to tenants what information they share with their landlord, but if they did, then that would be

16 Q. So in a situation such as perhaps Grenfell or Adair, if 17 housing were there, they would attend and speak to 18 a counterpart in the TMO and ask for information?

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20 Q. What would be your understanding as to the source of the 2.1 information the TMO would have?

22 A. It would be based on their property database. So they have a list of all the properties that they rent and all 23 2.4 of the tenants, and they would have a housing management

25 system, and on that housing management system, which are

1 common to all housing organisations, they would have $--\,$

2 may or may not have additional information on those

tenants

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Q. And how, if at all, would RBKC's adult social care

5 department fit in to this process about getting

6 information regarding vulnerable residents in

7 an incident where people have been decanted from

8 a property?

9 A. So adult social care, if they have involvement with the 10 tenant living in that particular property, would have

11 their own information, which would provide them with

12 information about anybody that they had been -- they had

13 provided services to or had involvement with. If adult

14 social care wanted information from the housing

15 department or from the TMO, then they would ask myself

16 or a member of my team directly if we had information on

17 that particular individual.

18 Q. So two potential sources of information regarding

19 vulnerable residents?

2.0 A. That's correct.

21 Q. If we move down, please, to the next action on the 2.2 document which is in front of us, it says this:

"In a future incident involving more than a couple 23 2.4 of RBKC/TMO dwellings, the LALO [local authority liaison 25

officer] or Contingency Planning Team [Mr Kerry's

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1 department] will attend the site and form a Scene 2 Incident Management Group along with Housing and TMO 3 [representatives].

That's something which was discussed as a process that would assist. Were you aware of that?

6 A. Yes

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- Q. And do you think that would be something that would 8 assist and improve the nature of any response?
- 9 A. Yes, because there would be then a collective place 10 where information could be ascertained about the people 11 who were impacted by the disaster, and then collectively 12 decisions made about how it was best to manage the needs 13 of the people who needed to be rehoused.
- 14 Q. We understand that that was not implemented as a new 15 process by June 2017. Do you know why that was?
- 16 A. Implemented in what way? As in a procedure note being 17 drafted and/or ...?
- 18 Q. It wasn't in place or documented that this was going to 19 be a process in the event of an emergency.
- 20 A. No, I don't know why there wasn't a formal process map 2.1 and/or addition made to the council's contingency plan 2.2 which updated it in this respect.
- 2.3 Q. From your experiences of 14 June, and as someone who 2.4 attended, as we will hear in a moment, very early on
- 25 14 June, do you think a scene incident management group

- 1 would have assisted the response?
- A. I think on 14 June, it was such an enormous incident of 2
- 3 such overwhelming scale that I'm not sure a scene
- incident management group would have made a great deal
- 5 of difference, because what happened in reality was that
- 6 the TMO did provide information based from people
- 7 on site, they did provide it to myself and to my
- 8 colleagues who were at the BECC, and so that happened, 9 but it just didn't happen on site at Grenfell Tower.
- 10 Q. Okay. I'll return to that comment a little bit later,
- 11 but I just want to deal with a little bit more in 12 relation to pre-fire documentation by way of assistance, 13 if possible
- Risk registers. 14
- 15 You refer to maintaining a risk register for housing 16 in your first statement at paragraph 11
- 17 $\{RBK00035592/3\}$ — we don't need to look at it — but is
- 18 it right that the housing risk register was not a risk
- 19 register within the meaning of the Civil Contingency 2.0 Act?
- 2.1 A. I don't know what a risk register is, to be honest with 2.2 you, in the context of the Civil Contingency Act. It
- 23 was a risk register that we were asked to complete 2.4 corporately on a quarterly basis.
- 25 Q. It may be we don't need to look at it, I can deal with

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- it a little bit shorter. So it dealt with internal
- housing department risks in relation to matters which
- 3 you had to be alive to and tried to address as best you
- 4 could: is that correct?
 - A. That's correct.
- Q. One matter to note from this register -- which, as you 6 7 describe, was reviewed and updated on a regular basis --
- was the risk in relation to the capacity of temporary 8
- 9 accommodation; is that correct?
- 10 A That's correct
- 11 Q. You say at paragraph 11 of your statement
- 12 {RBK00035592/3} that:
- 13 " ... we [the department] had significant problems 14 procuring temporary accommodation, or how we would
- 15 rehouse significant numbers of people in the event of
- 16 a fire . flood or natural disaster .
- 17 A. That's correct.
- 18 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Can you just give us some idea of
- what was on the risk register? I think it might help us 19
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- 2.1 A. It was quite a short document which just had very
- 22 high-level risks. It didn't go into a huge amount of
- 23 detail, which -- it didn't -- with a more detailed risk
- 2.4 register, you would expect significant description of
- 25 controls and mitigations and target scores. There was

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- 1 some scoring and there was some description of the risk,
- 2 and there was a limited description of the mitigations
- 3 that would take place. So it was contained normally on
- one to two pages with high-level risks, and a descriptor
 - of the risk and a descriptor of the mitigations.
- 6 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Can you give us an example of the
- 7 sort of risk we're talking about?
- 8 A. So -- oh, so other risks on the risk register would have
- 9 been around key features of the department, such as
- 10 temporary accommodation, which was a large part of what
- 11 we did, and about the financial risk of not being able
- 12 to, you know, procure enough temporary accommodation at
- 13 the right price and/or be able to house homeless
- applicants in sufficient time, or to meet our 14
- 15 requirement with regard to moving people out of B&B --
- 16 all, you know, kind of quite high-level stuff.
- 17 We were doing regeneration at the time or looking at
- 18 significant estate regeneration, and there would --
- 19 there may well have been highlights about if we couldn't 2.0 proceed with that and ...
- 21 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, thank you very much.
- MR KEATING: Thank you. 2.2
- 23 So you have mentioned the sort of general high-level
 - risks which you as a department kept track of --
- 25 A. That's correct.

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 ${\sf Q}.\ --$ and sought to mitigate where possible, and one of the identified risks I drew out was that one in relation to the significant problem of procuring temporary accommodation where a significant number of people were displaced.

> Perhaps we could turn to your statement at paragraph 14 of your first statement {RBK00035592/4}, please. Picking that up, it says:

"Discussions did take place about what action we would need to take if we needed to house a significant number of residents in an emergency situation. The reality however is that the options for short, medium and longer term housing is limited as the majority of the Council's housing stock is occupied and rented to residents. The type of accommodation the Council had available for temporary accommodation for homeless families would not in all likelihood be suitable or in the right location in an emergency situation. We had used hotels in and around the borough following the Adair fire. In the event of another fire taking place we would (depending on the scale) follow the same procedure."

Is that correct?

2.4 A. That's correct.

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25 Q. So in relation to this plan to respond to this

- identified risk as of June 2017, were there agreements 1 with local hotels or providers of accommodation to cater 2 3 for this event?
- A. No. there was not.
- Q. Was there a documented plan as to how to secure hotel accommodation in the event of a mass displacement of 6 7 residents, or was this sort of a general statement of 8 intent?
- 9 A. It was a general statement of intent.
- 10 Q. Do you think, in hindsight, it would have assisted 11 having a plan and some pre-agreement with hotels and 12 other providers of accommodation in this sort of 13 situation?
 - A. I think, in hindsight, it would have been helpful if we had been able to have an agreement in place with the major hotel groups about how they would assist us in case of emergency. But, in reality, it depended on the vacancy rate that they had at any one time, and it was the summer of -- June 2017 and the occupancy rate was extremely high at that point.

So, ves. in hindsight. I think that would have been a good thing for us to do, to speak to the major hotel groups in the borough and talk to them about how we may manage in that scenario, and how we may pay for hotel rooms in that scenario, because that was a particular

difficulty in the early days.

2 We will touch upon that a little bit later this morning 3 and see where situations arose.

4 In terms of training, we've touched upon that already in some of your answers this morning, and perhaps I could deal with that quite briefly . 6

> In terms of your training, you say this in your evidence at paragraph 9 {RBK00035592/2}:

9 "I was not a trained BECC officer, nor was 10 I assigned a defined role as a Bronze, Silver or Gold 11 operative in the event of an emergency. I do not know 12 the rationale used to decide on who did or did not 13 receive emergency planning training by the Contingency 14 Planning team.

Was that the position?

16 A That's correct

17 Q. You have mentioned that you did have training in 18 September 2015 in relation to -- that was a Gold Group

19 contingency training session; is that correct?

20 A. That's correct.

2.1 Q. We heard that was a two-hour session.

22 A. That's correct.

2.3 Do you recall attending any other training sessions in

2.4 the lead-up to June 2017 or during your time at RBKC?

2.5 A. No. I do not.

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1 Q. Do you recall scenario testing exercises, such as an exercise in November 2016 known as Exercise Poldark?

2 3 A. I do not recall that exercise. It may have been that

other members of my department attended, but I do not 5 remember attending.

6 Q. Perhaps a memorable name. Let me assist you a little

7 bit more with the events: a joint training exercise with

8 RBKC housing, the TMO and Octavia, held at Burgess Field

9 on 1 November 2016?

10 A. I did not attend.

11 Q. And this was -- again, just from completeness, perhaps

12 to assist everybody -- a three-hour exercise which 13 related to a gas leak leading to immediate evacuation of

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residents, being unable to return overnight. Doesn't

15 assist your recollection?

16 A. No, I did not attend.

17 Q. No.

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Finally, in relation to training, Exercise Babel.

19 This was a desktop exercise in November 2015, which 2.0

concerned a fire in a tower block and its evacuation.

21 Was that something that you were aware of?

2.2 A. No.

23 Q. I think as a matter of record, the housing team were not 2.4 invited and did not participate in that exercise.

2.5 A. I can only take your word for it , because I'm not --

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- 1 I have no recollection of it.
- $2\,$ $\,$ Q. Well, from your answers, you weren't aware of it, which
- 3 may --
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. probably explain that you weren't invited.
- 6 A. That's -- yes, I think you can infer that.
- 7 Q. Yes.

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I'm going to move on now, now we've dealt with plans and risk registers, and move on to the heart of your evidence, which deals with the response to the Grenfell Tower fire.

We're going to go through certain aspects in some detail, but before doing so, is it fair that from 14 June, over the next seven days and thereafter, you and your department were deployed in significant numbers and worked really long hours over those days trying to assist and provide support to those people who were displaced after the Grenfell Tower fire?

A. Yes. My department worked tirelessly over that time, and were deployed in all areas of supporting the residents who had been impacted by the dreadful events of June 2014 — sorry, June 2017, and were on the front line of helping people in order to be able to secure accommodation, attending rest centres, you know, visiting, visiting people in hotels, answering calls,

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- booking hotel rooms, yes. The full suite of actions that were required in order to try and find people
- 3 somewhere to live or somewhere to stay that was safe and
- 4 warm were undertaken by members of my team.
- 5 Q. We've got a number of statements from your colleagues.
- 6 You're the one live witness from the housing department.
- 7 But, in general terms, staff got in very early, worked
- 8 very late, some stayed in the office, some stayed in 9 hotels, and some travelled back some distances to where
- 10 they lived during that period of time.
- 11 A. That's correct, people worked very long hours and worked
 12 tirelessly in order to be able to provide the support
 13 and services that they thought were required for the
 14 people who were impacted by the disaster, and worked
 15 very hard.
- Q. So within that context, and not forgetting that, I want
 to examine certain aspects of the response, if that's
 okav.
- Let's deal with, first of all, how you learned of the response.
- 21 In your first statement at paragraph 15
 22 {RBK00035592/4}, you say that you became aware of the
 23 fire via a phone call from David Kerry at 02.34; is that
 24 correct?

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25 A. That's correct.

Q. Just after 2.30 in the morning.

At that stage, what was your understanding of the scale of the fire at Grenfell Tower when you were contacted by David Kerry that early in the morning?

5 A. David Kerry contacted me and advised me that there was
6 a fire in Grenfell Tower. I didn't get any sense from
7 that phone call of the scale of the fire at that time,
8 and he said he would contact me —— I believe he said he
9 would contact me again, you know, kind of if there was
10 further assistance needed.

So at that point, at that call at 2.30 in the morning, I knew there was a fire, but, from the phone call, I didn't get a sentiment of the scale of it. So what I did was I got up, turned on the TV news, turned on the internet, in order to be able to assess, to see if there was anything that I could see, you know, kind of that was happening.

Q. Yes. From those initial actions and turning on the television, is it fair to suggest, by 02.53 and your first email notification to your housing team, you were dealing, in your words, with a "massive fire"?

22 A. Yes, that's correct. I was watching videos on YouTube 23 of the fire starting to take hold at Grenfell. It was 24 just awful.

25 Q. And you were aware at that stage that there were

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1 rest centres open, and you say in this email to your

2 team there was likely to be a need to find

a considerable amount of emergency accommodation.

4 A. That's correct

5 Q. Your next update is at 04.03, and perhaps we could look 6 at that. That's {RBK00002747}. So this is an email 7 from you, the time is set out there, 14 June, 04.03, 8 sent to your team, and it says:

sent to your team, and it says:

"To all,

"Following on from my earlier report [that's the one I summarised a moment ago] the fire at Grenfell is very serious and the building is destroyed and the residents are very unlikely to be able to return, we shall need to mobilise this morning to ensure we can assess those affected by the fire and find emergency accommodation that is likely to be available both short and medium term.

"People will have no possessions and limited access to funds so we need to be aware of this when assessing our response.

21 "I am going up there now ..."

How soon did you anticipate this mobilisation would take place of your housing staff?

A. Straight away, really. It depends on who would see the
 email. I also did make some phone calls to key members

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of my management team as well to make them aware. So there was an email, there was phone calls, and then, you know, kind of —— I live some distance from RBKC and decided to travel in straight away before —— to drive in, and went straight to the Town Hall, and then I knew that the —— my colleagues from the housing department management team would be in very soon.

Q. You say in your statement at paragraph 25 {RBK00035592/6}, I'm going to summarise:

"The rest centres were not within my remit, but I knew I would need to send my team to the rest centres as soon as possible to speak to people about emergency re—housing."

Is that correct?

15 A. That's correct.

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16 Q. Would you need any information before mobilising your 17 housing officers to those rest centres?

18 A. Well, I would need to know where they were and what 19 facilities were available at those rest centres, because 20 my role, as I understood it, was to ensure that people 21 who were coming in to those rest centres, who would be 22 utterly in shock and traumatised, were to be met by 2.3 someone from -- would very quickly need to know where 2.4 they were going to stay, if they couldn't stay in the 25 short term with friends or relatives. So it would be my

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responsibility to make sure that my team were able to assess what people's needs were and then find somewhere for them to go.

- 4 Q. And at that stage of the morning, did you know where to 5 deploy RBKC housing officers to?
- 6 A. At 4 o'clock in the morning? No.
- 7 Q. I'll try and stick in a sort of chronological narrative.
- 8 A. Yeah.

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9 Q. We'll return to that question in a moment.

But we know from your statement at paragraph 18 $\{RBK00035592/5\}$ that you spoke again with David Kerry at 03.49 and confirmed to him that the TMO were on site, including Robert Black.

What did you consider the role of the TMO to be that morning on the Grenfell Tower site?

A. So I knew that the TMO would be there and I knew that Robert was there already. I knew that Robert would probably be arranging for other members of his team to be there at the time as well, and at that point, depending on, you know, kind of how serious the incident was, they'd be providing information and advice, possibly to the emergency services.

 $23 \hspace{1cm} \hbox{What they could do in an incident of that scale,} \\$

24 I don't know, to be honest.25 Q. Was there any discussion be

Q. Was there any discussion between you and Robert Black or

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anybody else at the TMO that morning as to their role?

A. I probably wouldn't describe it in those terms

3 I talked to Robert Black and other members of the TMO

 $4\,$ $\,$ a number of times over the course of that morning, and

5 it was a case of gathering information about what was

 $\,$ 6 $\,$ taking place at Grenfell Tower at the time. I didn't go

7 to the tower, I went to the Town Hall, I went to the

 $\,\,$ BECC, as I considered that to be the most useful place

for me to go in order to be able to co-ordinate events

10 from the housing department, but I knew the TMO were

on site, so they were providing very useful information back to me and to other colleagues to tell me what was

taking place at the time and who was evacuated and the

14 scale of the fire and what was taking place.

Q. In terms of the scale of the fire, at that stage, from the information that you were receiving, how would you assess the scale of the fire as being fed back to you?

18 A. At 4 o'clock in the morning?

19 Q. Yes

A. As it sets out in my email, I had seen pictures on the
 internet that the fire was extremely serious, so it was
 my expectation that no one would be returning to

23 Grenfell.

24 Q. Okay.

You have touched upon it already, but you travelled

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 $1\,$ from your home to the Town Hall. You arrived at 05.15,

which is set out in your statement at paragraph 21

3~ {RBK00035592/6}. Then you go on at paragraph 22 to

state that you were in the BECC, the borough emergency

command centre, co-ordinating information coming from

5 command centre, co—ordinating information coming from 6 the site. You mention that that's where Robert Black

6 the site. You mention that that's where Robert Black

7 was based, as was Nicholas Holgate at that stage of the

8 morning; is that correct?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. I wonder if we could have a look at your statement at
11 paragraph 24, please, of your first statement
12 {RBK00035592/6}. It's at an early part of your
13 statement where you're describing the incident, which
14 I've just summarised, that you were in the BECC at
15 paragraph 23, and you say this at paragraph 24:

"RBKC was not sufficiently prepared to deal with
 a fire that was so devastating and of such a significant

impact."

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19 Is that correct?

20 A. In my opinion, yes.

Q. When did you form that view that RBKC was not
 sufficiently prepared to deal with a fire that was so

23 devastating and of such a significant impact?

A. I can't say with any certainty when I formed that view,
 but it wasn't possibly right at the time, because I was

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- 1 just dealing with the incident at the time. It was 2 probably subsequently, when I had time to reflect.
- 3 Q. So this was more an opinion which you arrived at after 4 events, looking back, rather than as you were in the 5 BECC that morning?
- A. That's correct. Whilst I was in the BECC that morning, 6 7 I was just extremely busy, and so I don't think I had the time to form a view. I was just taking actions and 8 9 instructing my team accordingly, and they were acting on 10 their own initiative as well in order to be able to 11 provide and find as much accommodation as we could for 12
- the people who were affected by the fire. 13 Q. And that morning, early morning in the BECC, from 14 5 o'clock through to perhaps 8, 9, 10 o'clock in the 15 morning, how would you describe how the BECC was 16 operating?
- 17 A. I didn't know -- I have never been to -- never been in 18 a BECC in full operation before, so I had no concept or expectations of what a BECC would do, to be honest. 19 2.0 There was a lot of people in the BECC. There were 21 people taking notes, there were people answering calls, 22 it was a very busy environment. But I would say my 2.3 perception at that time and subsequently when thinking 2.4 about it was there was nobody leading the BECC from

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those very early hours of the morning and providing

1 instruction to colleagues.

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2 Q. You say at paragraph 23, which is just in front of you: 3 "It was not chaotic at the BECC, but equally it was 4 not very well organised either as there was a lack of 5 direction over tasks that needed to be undertaken. 6 Nicholas Holgate was in meetings constantly, but it was 7 not his role to lead the BECC."

Do you still stand by those comments or is there anything else you wanted to add?

- 10 A. No, I stand by those comments.
- 11 Q. You mentioned:

"Stuart Priestley took charge of the BECC as the morning progressed. He worked tirelessly to try to co-ordinate events from the BECC, assisted by Rebecca Blackburn."

Is that correct?

- A. That's correct. Yes, Stuart came in and started to, 17 18 you know, kind of take charge of events that needed to 19 take place from the BECC, and Rebecca Blackburn, who 2.0 worked in the emergency planning team, very ably 21 assisted him and understood the role of the BECC very 2.2 clearly .
- Q. If we could scroll back up to paragraph 22, again to 23 2.4 assist you, I'm going to move on to a topic of 25 discussions or a meeting with Nicholas Holgate.

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We see at paragraph 22 that you had arrived, and it 2 says this, about four lines down:

3 "Members of the Council's management team started to 4 arrive at the BECC by 06:00. As a management team, we discussed what resources were needed to support survivors. We all had an input on what was required, 6 7 and we discussed what services were needed. My primary 8 role was to provide re-housing services."

> I'm just going to move on to paragraph 28 $\{RBK00035592/7\}$. So keep that in mind, so the 6 o'clock management team discussion, and we move on to paragraph 28

"At around 06:30, there was an informal meeting in the Holland Room in Kensington Town Hall between Nicholas Holgate, Stuart Priestley, David Kerry and myself."

17 Well, the Holland Room is the BECC: isn't that 18 correct?

- 19 A. I believe it is veah.
- 20 Q. Yes. So we've got a reference there in the first 21 paragraph, at paragraph 22, to a discussion as 22 a management team, and then I just showed you 23 a moment ago an informal meeting at 6.30 between 2.4 yourself, Stuart Priestley, David Kerry and

2.5 Nicholas Holgate.

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1 Were they separate or were they the same event?

2 A. I believe they were separate, although, to be honest 3 with you, it's five years ago and I can't remember in

that level of detail. But for the people who were

- 5 arriving in the BECC who were senior members of the RBKC
- 6 management team, I believe what I'm referring to is
- 7 an informal discussion amongst people who were there at 8 the time about what people's roles and responsibilities
- 9 would be in order to help the survivors of the fire.
- 10 Q. And in relation to the first discussion as people 11 arrived, was that with Nicholas Holgate, or was the 12 latter informal meeting at 6.30 when he arrived?
- 13 A I don't remember whether Nicholas was there at 6 o'clock or whether he was part of that informal discussion. The 14
- 15 second one at 6.30 clearly references Nicholas.
- 16 Q. Okay.

17 Let's focus on the second, more formal informal 18 meeting, as you describe at paragraph 28, and in 19 relation to what was discussed.

20 So vou have mentioned David Kerry was present, and 21 he was the manager, as we know, of the contingency planning team and a specialist in that field. Did he 23 give any advice to Nicholas Holgate about the incident 2.4 at that stage?

25 A. I really don't remember, to be honest.

1 Q. Do you remember anything about this informal meeting at 1 and that's Stuart Priestley's log. That's 2 06.30? 2 {RBK00013318}, please. 3 A. I do not. 3 So this is a log which Stuart Priestley has given 4 Q. David Kerry in his statement -- and perhaps we could 4 evidence about. It was prepared a couple of days after 5 look at his statement, please, his first statement at 5 the incident, so not contemporaneous, but close to {RBK00033579}, please. If we open up that, that's his 6 6 contemporaneous. 7 statement there. 7 Scroll down to the bottom of this page, please. He 8 At page 18 {RBK00033579/18}, paragraph 81, he 8 notes at 6.30 -- so the same time that you gave as this 9 describes and logs a meeting which you attended that day 9 informal meeting with Nicholas Holgate. He was at that 10 10 time or soon to be Council Silver, so the person who was at a later time, at 10 o'clock, and perhaps I could ask 11 you about that and see if this assists your 11 responsible for the tactical operation. 12 12 recollection: "Meeting with: Robert Black, Laura Johnson, 13 "At 10 am I attended a meeting with Laura Johnson, 13 Nicholas Holgate, David Kerry: David provided an update Robert Black of the TMO, Nicholas Holgate and 14 as had been feedback to him by the on-site LALO and 14 15 Stuart Priestley at the Town Hall. Nicholas Holgate 15 gathered from the meeting he had dialled into." 16 16 That was likely to be the SCG. said that he was going to convene the Council 17 Gold Group. This was effectively a handover meeting for 17 "DK [David Kerry] advised of the scale of the 18 me, and a pre-meeting before the Council Gold meeting. 18 tragedy. Robert [Black] reported he had attended the 19 I gave advice at this point that this incident was 19 site and it was very serious indeed. Nicholas [Holgate] 2.0 bigger than any one local authority in London could 2.0 advises he has spoken with the Leader who has agreed to 21 manage and consideration should be given to seeking 21 fund anything necessary for the relief effort. David 22 mutual aid.' 22 advised Nicholas [Holgate] of the mutual aid 2.3 23 So in relation to that meeting at 10 o'clock, or any arrangements available via [London Local Authority Gold] 2.4 other discussion with David Kerry and you and 2.4 and our neighbouring boroughs." 25 Nicholas Holgate together on that morning, do you recall 2.5 So, pausing there, this is another record of 37 39 1 that advice being given? 1 a meeting at which you were an attendee where it states 2 A. I do not. 2 that advice was given regarding seeking mutual aid or 3 Q. Do you accept that it would be a significant statement 3 external assistance. if the specialist in the field was saying that this Does that assist your recollection? 5 incident was bigger than any one local authority in 5 A. To be honest with you, no, I don't remember the details 6 London could manage and consideration should be given to 6 of that meeting. 7 7 seeking mutual aid? Q. Do you remember your superior, your line manager, the 8 town clerk of the local authority, saying, "That looks A. Yes. 8 9 9 Q. Do you recall any discussions that morning about the like we can't cope", when there was that offer of 10 magnitude of the incident and advice or the need to get 10 assistance discussed? 11 external help? 11 If I remembered it, I would say, but I -- quite 12 A. I don't. 12 honestly, I can't remember the details of that meeting SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Should we understand that you don't 13 13 at 6.30 that morning. 14 Q. The last part in relation to that note: 14

have a very good recollection of that meeting and that what's being said here might have occurred but you don't remember, or is it a case of your remembering that it didn't occur? 18 A. I don't remember. I don't remember the detail of the meeting. So it may have -- that may have been the advice that was given, but I don't remember in that level of detail. I was very focused at that time on my own tasks in hand.

23 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes. Thank you, that's helpful.

2.4 MR KEATING: If we could look at one other document which

perhaps may assist your recollection of events, please,

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ceased."

of this?

2.2 Do you have any recollection of how Mr Holgate was that 23 morning when you saw him come in to the BECC, and during 2.4 this informal meeting you noted in your statement at 25 6.30?

A. I don't have a recollection of the detail of that

quite honestly, what was said in that meeting

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"The conversation on mutual aid at that point

So your evidence is that you've got no recollection

meeting. I know it took place, but I couldn't tell you,

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- 1 A. Extremely worried. It was a terrible, terrible 2 incident, and, you know, extremely worried is probably 3 the only way I could put it.
- 4 Q. In relation to this topic, not going behind your 5 evidence, but this topic of seeking external assistance, you've described the magnitude of the incident; did you 6
- 7 think at that stage there was the need for RBKC to get 8 external assistance?
- 9 A. I don't remember considering that at that point in time. 10
- As I said, I was very —— at that point, just very 11 focused on making sure that the housing department were
- 12 doing everything they possibly could in order to book as
- 13 many hotel rooms as we possibly could, and to think
- 14 about how we could then get up to the Grenfell Tower
- 15 area in order to be able to provide people with that
- 16 information and move people on. I don't remember
- 17 consciously thinking about what else or who else should
- 18 be helping us at that point in time.
- 19 Q. So the final point really in relation to this is that 20 you acknowledged and are aware that this was an incident
- 2.1 of magnitude. A. Absolutely.

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- 2.3 Q. From your email, you describe a substantial number of
- 2.4 displaced people whose homes were destroyed in the most
- 25 traumatic circumstances.

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- 1 A That's correct
- Q. And on any basis, is it the case that there was a huge 2 3 challenge that you as a housing department faced that
- 4 morning by 6.30?
- 5 A. That's correct
- 6 MR KEATING: Let's move on to the next topic, which is
- 7 deployment of housing staff.
- SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Before we do --8
- 9 MR KEATING: Yes.
- SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: I'm sorry, I keep interrupting. 10
- 11 MR KEATING: No, please do.
- 12 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Just help me with this: there
- 13 obviously was a meeting at 6.30.
- A. Yes 14
- 15 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: But you don't have much of 16 a recollection of it.
- 17 At that stage, did it cross your mind whether you 18 had enough people in your department to carry out all 19 the functions which were going to have to be performed
- over the next, let's say, 12 hours? 2.0
- 21 A. No. it didn't cross my mind at that point. I wasn't
- 2.2 thinking: I've got 120 people, how am I going to divide
- 23 them up? I was thinking: I have got a team of
- 2.4 homelessness and housing advice officers who are well

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25 equipped, because that's what they do day to day, is

- find people accommodation; how do we deploy them and how
- 2 do we book as many rooms as we can, how do we find as
- 3 much accommodation as we can, and how do I get those
- 4 people on site in order to provide that link to get
- people into the hotels? That was as far-reaching as my 5 6 thinking was going at that point in time.
- 7 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right. I ask the question because
- 8 had you thought at that stage that you were going to be
- 9 shorthanded, questions about mutual aid would have had
- 10 more significance, but if it wasn't present to your
- 11 mind --
- 12 A. I had no concept at that time, having never been
- 13 involved in an emergency of this scale or this type
- 14 before, you know, how long this was going to go on for 15
- and how wide it was going to be. All I could see were 16 the pictures on the news in the BECC about that tower
- 17 So in subsequent days, we did ask for help and said
- 18 we needed more people, but at that point in time it was
- 19 just about how we could deploy our resources to help. 2.0
- I wasn't thinking more broadly at that point in time. 21 I wasn't thinking strategically, I was thinking in terms
- 22 of a series of actions that needed to be taken in the 23 moment.
- 2.4 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right. Thank you very much.
- 2.5 Yes, Mr Keating.

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- MR KEATING: Just really following on from that answer, you
- 2 were quite candid in saying that you were focusing on
- 3 actions, but you weren't thinking strategically, and you
- also said earlier on that this was such an enormous
- incident of an overwhelming scale.
 - Was it the position that you and perhaps some of
- 7 your colleagues were just overwhelmed by the magnitude
 - of the incident at that stage?
- 9 A. I don't think I was overwhelmed by it. I was aware of 10
- the scale of it, and was breaking it down into a series
- 11 of tasks that the housing department could undertake in
- 12 order to be able to help manage the outcome from that.
- 13 But I -- I didn't freeze or stop or, you know, kind of
- 14 decide that I couldn't manage. I decided that there
- 15 were a number of actions that needed to be taken at that
- 16 time, in that moment, in order to be able to provide
- 17 assistance immediately to the people who were affected
- 18 by the fire . But I wouldn't say I was overwhelmed by
- 19 it . I'd said I was -- responded in a very practical
- 20 fashion about what I considered to be the best way to
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- 2.2 Q. The final point in this is that you didn't freeze or
- 23 stop, as you describe it, but did you stop to think
 - strategically at that stage?
- 25 A. I didn't stop to think, I -- at 6.30 in the morning,

I didn't stop to think strategically . I did subsequently as the day went on, but at 6.30 in the morning, it was about corralling the resources available to me in the housing department in order to be able to provide that response. As the day wore on and, indeed, on the next day, then I definitely started to think about how to manage in the broader sense for the short, medium and long term for the people who needed to be rehoused.

Q. If we could look at an email, please, which you sent at 07.41. That's {RBK00001026}, and we're now dealing with the topic of deployment of housing staff. We see the second email is from you, it's at 07.41 to Robert Shaw in your department, copying in other members of staff, regarding "What is needed?":

"We shall be organising a team to send to the two rest centre[s] to assess the displaced people's housing need[s] and arrange alternative accommodation for them.

"Amanda phoning around commercial hotels now to find

"We are also setting up a protocol for those people in hospital who will be discharged and need to be read

Does that summarise the role of the housing officers who attended the rest centres at that stage, that they

- 1 were going to attend to assess the needs of those, as termed here, displaced peoples and arrange alternative 2 3 accommodation for them?
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- Q. When were they deployed, on your account?
- 5 A. I don't -- I think there's a record that they were 6 7 deployed some time later in the morning at around 8 10 o'clock and made it up to the rest centres at around 9 10.30, because they needed to walk from the Town Hall up 10 to the Clement James Centre and Rugby Portobello Trust, 11 because of the -- you know, obviously because of the 12 limitations of being able to get public transport or 13 a taxi
- 14 Q. So in the region of 10 o'clock they were deployed?
- 15 A. That's correct.
- 16 Q. And then, because of the transport difficulties , they 17 went on foot --
- 18 A. That's correct.
- 19 $Q. \ --$ to the centres

2.0 We saw earlier on that email at 04.03 where you 21 recognised the need to mobilise members of the housing 2.2 team to get to the rest centre --

- 23
- 24 $\mathsf{Q}.\ --$ and I asked you questions about that. Why was there 25 a delay of about six hours for their actual deployment

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to the rest centres?

- 2 A. I didn't know which rest centres to send them to. So
- 3 I didn't know which centres were being used, which
- 4 particular community facilities in that location were
- the best two centres to send them to. Between 4 o'clock 5
- and 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, staff were still 6
- 7 arriving in the Town Hall, so it wasn't until a point in
- 8 time in the early morning that I had sufficient staff in 9 order to be able to send two groups of sufficient
- 10 numbers in order to be able to go to those rest centres,
- 11 and I think I was waiting for clarification in terms of
- 12 numbers we could send and where was the best place to
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- 14 Q. So two reasons, summarising your evidence.
- 15 A. Yeah.
- Q. One, clarification regarding rest centres or knowing 16 17 where they were; and, secondly, sufficient staff
- 18 arriving.

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- 19 20 Q. In relation to the location of the rest centres, on your
 - account you were in contact with the TMO that morning --
- 2.2 A. That's correct.
- 2.3 Q. -- in the BECC. Did it not become apparent from your
- 2.4 arrival around 5.30/5.15, up until 10 o'clock, where
- 25 those rest centres were?

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- A. At that time, there was a number of different locations
- 2 where the local community had opened their doors, as
 - they would, and helped people, so it was my
- understanding that there were a number of different
- 5 places where the community were providing assistance
- 6 from and to. But at that time I wasn't aware of what
- 7 was a formal rest centre that was being operated that
- 8 would provide that focus about where everybody would go
- 9 or be able to tell people to go to that location. So it
- 10 was a very, very fluid situation, and I was reacting to
- 11 the information that was being provided to me.
- 12 Q. You say at paragraph 33 of your statement
- 13 {RBK00035592/8}, which I can summarise:
- 14 "Amanda Gill took two teams, about 10 a-piece, to
- 15 the St Clement James Centre and Rugby Portobello Trust." 16
 - Is that correct?
- 17 A. That's correct, yes.
- 18 Q. Did you consider that deploying two teams of ten members
- 19 at that point was sufficient in light of the amount of 2.0
 - displaced people from the tower and the surrounding
- 21
- 2.2 That was the staff I had available to me and those were
- 23 the two rest centres that I understood were in
- 2.4 operation, and then I sent a further team to the Westway
- 25 when I understood that that sports centre became

available and was also considered to be a rest centre. so a third team was then made available.

At that point I didn't really have a -- obviously I knew how many people lived in Grenfell Tower, and I was familiar with how many people lived in the local -- in the locality, but I went with the resources that I had available to me at that time.

- 8 Q. So, "That's all I had"?
- 9 A. Yes.

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- 10 Q. Do you think, bearing in mind the numbers involved, that 11 was sufficient at that stage?
- A. Based on the information that came back later in the 12 13 day, then there was clearly a need for more at that 14 time, but that's what we had at the time and that's what 15 we sent up and believed -- in order to be able to 16 provide information to people and place them into 17 accommodation.
- 18 Q. And at that stage in the morning, was it the case that 19 there was a real lack of information regarding the 20 number of people who were at the various rest centres?
- 2.1 A. Yes, there was no central -- there was no collation of 2.2 information that was saying: there's 40 people at this church and there's 10 people at this centre and there's 2.3 2.4 20 people over there. There was no co-ordination of 25 that event.

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And, of course, it was extremely fluid. People were coming out of the tower or coming out of the local estates, and some people were obviously heading straight to a rest centre because they needed that kind of advice and information and/or just to kind of process what was happening to them, whereas other people may well have gone to stay with friends or neighbours or relatives on the estate and, you know, found somewhere else. So it was a very, very fluid situation in terms of the number of people who I believe were accessing the support on the Lancaster West Estate at that time.

But I wasn't there, so it's very difficult for me to say, but that was my understanding.

14 Q. Lunderstand.

> What was the process of how those who were displaced by the fire were able to access emergency accommodation? So if someone was at a rest centre, what would happen?

A. So they would -- when my two teams went up to meet them, then the teams would take their names, take their information, ask them for details of their family composition, and then there was a team in the Town Hall that were booking hotels and arranging accommodation, and then the team in the Town Hall would let the team at the rest centres know what was available, give them the names of the hotel that they needed to send them to, and

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then arrange for transport to take them to those hotels.

2 Q. In relation to taking details at the scene, at those

3 rest centres, we've got the benefit of Amanda Gill's 4 statement as well. but is it the case that there wasn't

5 internet access and those needs were written down on placement forms, rather than electronically? 6

7 A. That's correct. It wasn't done on the internet or on

8 a SharePoint site. It was done via officers writing

9 down people's names, understanding -- trying to

10 understand how many rooms or how many beds they needed,

11 taking down phone numbers, taking down information from 12 them, and then phoning that through to the Town Hall in

13 order to be able to match what we had available to us to

14 the families' needs.

15 Q. So the information would then go to the individual in 16 the Town Hall, who was the team in the Town Hall --

17 A. Yes

18 Q. -- which was --

19 A. Was booking accommodation.

20 Q. Yes. And how would the Town Hall part of the housing 2.1 department communicate the accommodation to the person

22 who was displaced? How would they know?

2.3 A. So they were phoning or emailing the team on site,

2.4 letting them know what accommodation we had available.

2.5 They were keeping -- the team in the Town Hall were

1 keeping a spreadsheet of all of the hotel rooms that we

2 booked and the size of the hotel rooms and where they

3 were, and then when they were notified by the team at

the rest centres of the requirements, they matched them

5 to those rooms, they phoned them or emailed them and let

6 them know, and then the team at the rest centre then let

7 the person know where they were going.

8 Q. Okay. We'll explore the outcome in relation to that 9 process a little bit later in the morning, but in 10 relation to other rest centres, you mentioned that staff

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later went to the Westway when that became --

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. — known to you: is that correct?

A. That's correct. 14

15 Q. Housing staff.

16 Were you aware that the TMO staff were at 17 rest centres other than the Clement James Centre, Rugby 18 Portobello Trust and the Westway?

19 A. I don't recollect, to be honest.

2.0 Q. A TMO staff list which we have shows that from 5.30 to

21 2 o'clock on 14 June. TMO staffed five rest centres, and

2.2 that includes two which we haven't mentioned this

23 morning: the Methodist church and the Latimer Christian

2.4 Centre. So there's TMO officers at those rest centres,

25 but is it the case that no housing officers were

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- 1 deployed to those rest centres?
- 2 A. That's correct.

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- 3 Q. How was it anticipated that those displaced people who 4 came from the tower and the surrounding areas who went 5 to those rest centres would receive assistance with 6 emergency accommodation?
- A. To be honest, I don't know. We were sending available staff to the rest centres that we had been made aware of 8 9 which were, I suppose, designated as the official 10 rest centres. There was a fairly good line of communication between the TMO and RBKC housing, and it 11 12 may well have been that officers from the TMO were 13 alerted to the fact that RBKC housing officers were going to the Clement James and to the Rugby Portobello 14 15 and then could pass information on to them.

At that time, to be honest. I wasn't aware of all the different rest centres that were available. I knew that there was two. These seemed to be the most centrally organised ones. I'm going to send people there because that seems the most logical place to send people in order to provide advice and assistance.

Q. You mentioned the number of staff you had, and that was perhaps, is it fair to say, a factor as well, the available staff to you that morning to deploy to these various rest centres?

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- 1 A. I don't know if availability of staff, to be honest, was 2 a limiting factor in where I sent people, because there
- 3 was eventually three teams. I think it was, to be
- honest with you, more where the rest centre was
- 5 identified which then targeted the resources
- 6 accordingly, rather than sending people to lots of 7 centres.
- 8 Q. In terms of this theme of capacity of staff and numbers 9 of those who were displaced, you indicate in your 10 statement by 17.48, so nearly 6 o'clock that afternoon 11 on 14 June, evening, the number of potential residents 12 evacuated in the cordoned area was 845. That was 13 communicated to vou.

By that stage, did you consider you had sufficient housing officers present at the rest centres in light of the number of people we're discussing?

- 17 A. I don't remember consciously thinking of the number of 18 staff I had at the rest centres and correlating it with 19 the 845 people that were inside or outside of the 2.0 cordon.
- 2.1 Q. Okav.
- 2.2 I'm going to move on to hotel bookings, which you 23 have touched upon, and how there was somebody back at 2.4 the Town Hall who was undertaking those bookings.
 - You mention in your statement it was recognised at

1 an earlier stage that there would be a need for

- a substantial number of hotel bookings, and that's set
- 3 out in your statement at paragraph 25 {RBK00035592/6},
- 4 that when your team arrived at the Town Hall, they
- 5 started to book hotels immediately; is that correct?
- A. That's correct. 6
 - Q. Was there a criteria for selecting hotels booked at that
- 8 9 A. We were looking for hotels that were three star and
- above, and we were aiming for them to be in the borough 11 or in boroughs that adjoined RBKC, because the intention
- 12 was that if people were displaced and had to be placed
 - into a hotel, that they needed to be as close as
- 14 possible $\,--\,$ to RBKC as possible, because people needed
 - to be near their support network, so they would need to
- 16 be near doctors, schools, you know, advice and
 - information, and the intention was not to place them at
- 18 a distance which would cause them significant
- 19 disadvantage in being able to get back to RBKC.
- 20 Q. So that was the stated intention at that early stage.
- 2.1 A. Yes.
- 2.2 Q. You mention at paragraph 27 of your statement 23 {RBK00035592/7}:
- 2.4 "We initially just googled all hotels in the area, 2.5

and started calling around, firstly in RBKC [within the

- 1 local authority] and then moving out into other central 2. London boroughs."
 - Is that correct?
- A. That's correct.
- Q. Was it the case that it was difficult to block book 5
- accommodation on the scale needed on 14 June? 6
- 7 A. That's correct.
- 8 Q. You used the phrase "pre-emptive booking" in your 9 statements, but was it really just a scramble to book as 10 many rooms as you could that morning?
- 11 A. That's correct.
- 12 Again, something which you mentioned a little bit 13 earlier this morning, but I just want to explore it now in a bit more detail: were there issues in relation to 14
- 15 processing payments for those hotels booked on 14 June
- 16 and thereafter?
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- 18 Q. Perhaps we could have a look at paragraph 87, which may 19 assist you, of your statement, please {RBK00035592/24}:
- 2.0 "The payment of hotels was difficult. We didn't 21 have sufficient credit using the payment methods we had. 2.2 There was an initial raising of credit limits on the 23 corporate cards at on [sic] the morning of the 14th."
 - Pausing there, even in those early hours before the initial raising of the credit limits of corporate cards,

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2 in terms of booking the number of rooms you required? 3 A. To be honest with you, I don't remember in that level of 4 detail, and I wasn't doing the phoning around, but I've 5 clearly said in my statement that there were some hotels that wanted payment in advance and it became more 6 7 difficult as time went by. So we were phoning, we were asking for room availability , we were -- we thought 8 9

was it the case that there were problems at the outset

that, you know, as a local authority, phoning around 10 with our corporate -- you know, kind of corporate 11 financial strength, that it wouldn't be queried with us

12 about payment, but it was,

Q. Yes. You say here:

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"However, some hotels wanted payment in advance and as the week went on, we were maxing out the payment cards and not able to guarantee payments. Some hotels then started refusing to take people."

In relation to that problem which developed, as you say, as the week went on, was that difficulty with payment confined to making new bookings or did it lead to the termination of any existing bookings that you were perhaps seeking to extend or roll over?

2.3 A. I don't know that level of detail, to be honest with 2.4 vou. or I don't remember it now.

The hotels had existing bookings. It was a very

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busy period in London at that time, as it usually is in the summer, so hotels had bookings and could only take bookings for a certain period of time, and then some hotels said -- wanted payment upfront, and it just -not all hotels operate in the same way. But I couldn't say with certainty that it caused the termination of some rooms because of the payment difficulties. I don't have that level of detail or, if I did, I don't remember it now, five years later.

Q. The final point in relation to this topic is:

"It took until the following week to speak to the Chief Executives at some of the hotels to agree to take people again. That caused us considerable difficulties . Some members of the team went as far as paying on their personal bank accounts to secure rooms."

Is that correct?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. So the position was during 14 June and thereafter, because of payment difficulties, members of your team were using their own credit cards on occasion to pay for rooms?

2.2 A. That's correct. I was staggered, to be honest with you, 23 that anybody watching the news and seeing the dreadful 2.4 events unfolding could question whether we -- the 25 payment for rooms for survivors of the Grenfell Tower

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fire, but it did take intervention at the highest level in order to be able to secure that agreement by hotels in the capital in order to be able to take people.

4 Q. So there was two aspects to this: one, the hotels and their various approaches --5

6 A. Yes.

Q. — but also the RBKC processes.

Were there efforts internally to try to extend the credit cards and facilities?

10 A. Yes. So the matter was raised about the difficulty with 11 hotel bookings, and there was extension -- there were 12 extensions on corporate credit card limits, and asked -13 I remember distinctly asking on the Saturday after the 14 fire, when -- at Westminster that there needed to be 15 intervention raised at the highest level with senior 16 people in hotel groups in order to be able to lift this 17 blockage, because it was a very, very unnecessary 18 problem, in my view, that, you know, could be resolved 19 by just some common sense, to be honest with you.

> No hotel was not going to get paid, and I understand it was not their problem, and it was our problem to resolve, but with their help, and I would have hoped that basic humanity would have said that they would have said. "Yes, these are the rooms, we'll sort out payment with you and we'll keep a log", but that wasn't the case

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in all cases

Q. In terms of a lesson learned, having perhaps 2. 3 an agreement in advance with hotels and a plan in 4 relation to that may perhaps have avoided such 5 a problem?

A. It may well have helped if we had had an agreement in advance with somebody like the Hilton Group that there could be -- you know, kind of there was a process in place for that. I do understand that hotels have their own payment processes and systems and the managers of individual hotels probably can't deviate from that without very senior management intervention, so, yes, it probably would have helped in advance to have those payment systems set up in advance. But I think the scale of this was issue meant you could have had that arrangement with the large Copthorne hotel just off Kensington High Street, you could have made that arrangement with one hotel, but actually the scale of this meant we were booking multiple rooms in multiple hotels across the capital, so it probably wouldn't have been possible to have that arrangement in place with the sheer scale of hotel rooms and the sheer number of hotels that we were booking.

23 2.4 MR KEATING: Thank you.

25 Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?

SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, thank you very much. 1 A. I don't remember, to be honest. 2 Well, we said we'd have a break during the morning, Q. You mentioned in your statement here that you raised it 3 and you know the way we work, so we are going to stop 3 at Gold meetings and with Nicholas Holgate. Can you 4 there. We are going to resume, please, at 11.35, and 4 recall whether there was a specific response when you 5 I have to ask you, please don't talk to anyone about 5 raised the issues in relation to hotel accommodation? your evidence or anything relating to it while you're A. I think there was a desire to speak to more senior 6 6 out of the room. All right? 7 people in the hotel groups to see if there could be any Thank you very much. Would you go with the usher, 8 latitude extended to RBKC in order to be able to secure 8 9 9 the rooms and arrange for payment to be made and that 10 (Pause) 10 not to be a problem. 11 Thank you very much. 11.35, then, please. 11 Q. So issues with payment, issues with availability, issues 12 MR KEATING: Thank you. 12 with the length of a booking due to availability. SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you. 13 13 Were alternative accommodation, such as serviced 14 accommodation, considered to meet the different needs of 14 (11.20 am) 15 (A short break) 15 those requiring accommodation, such, perhaps, as (11.35 am) 16 families? 16 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Good, ready to carry on, Ms Johnson? 17 17 A. We were looking at all types of accommodation that were 18 THE WITNESS: Yes 18 available to us. So some hotels have apartments rather SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you. 19 19 than just rooms. We were receiving huge numbers of 20 20 Yes, Mr Keating. offers from different organisations, and we were logging 2.1 MR KEATING: Thank you, Mr Chairman. 21 all of those offers and having a look at whether they 22 I want to stay with this theme of hotel 22 were reasonable or suitable or available for any period 2.3 23 accommodation, if we can, for a moment, and deal with of time in order to be able to accommodate people who 2.4 the topic of length of bookings. 2.4 needed to be housed in an emergency scenario 25 Is it right that there were particular issues during 2.5 Q. Dealing with those offers of accommodation, and we'll 1 those seven days with the length of bookings that could 1 perhaps turn to that in a short while, but was it the 2 be made at hotels? 2 case that a decision was made really to focus on hotel 3 A. Yes 3 accommodation? Q. You have touched upon that in your statement, which we A. Yes, we were stuck with hotel accommodation as being 5 had in front of us, at paragraph 88, please 5 something that was readily available and in the {RBK00035592/25}. It's touched upon at the top of 6 6 locality 7 7 paragraph 88, about the sheer volume of rooms, the fact Q. We have your statement open now. I wonder if we could 8 go back, please, to page 10 {RBK00035592/10} and 8 that it was the summer, and other events which were 9 9 paragraph 39.2, please. This is where you summarise the happening in West London and Central London; is that 10 10 11 o'clock RBKC Gold Group meeting. 11 11 You had mentioned when we were at paragraph 88 12 Q. "It was difficult trying to keep each family in the same 12 raising issues regarding hotel accommodation. Let's 13 13 $room\ when\ hotels\ already\ pre-booked\ those\ rooms\ for$ deal with this, please. It's at 39.2: "Block bookings of hotels have been made until 14 14 future dates.' 15 15 A Yes Monday as a short-term solution." 16 Q. "No residents were told they would have to leave for any 16 Was the effect of booking hotels that Wednesday, 17 17 other reason than pre-bookings on their rooms. We 14 June, up until Monday as a short-term solution that 18 didn't know how long they would or could be there for." 18 there was a cycle of having to rebook rooms again and 19 A. That's correct. 19 again? Q. You raised the issue of families moving rooms with the 2.0 2.0 A. Yes 2.1 BECC at Gold meetings and with Nicholas Holgate. 21 Q. As a result of that, because of the issues we've 2.2 A. Yes. 2.2 mentioned, in a number of cases, a significant number of

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cases, displaced residents who were in hotels would then

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A. Yes. I mean, depending on the availability of the rooms

have to move to another hotel.

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availability?

Q. What was the response when you raised the issue of

families having to move rooms because of lack of

in that hotel, who would obviously have received
a number of advance bookings for their hotel room, if
they had availability then we could continue to extend
the residents' stay in that hotel, but if they did not
have availability, then we needed to find them
alternative accommodation.

Q. Well, let's look at that a little bit more, please.

If we turn to {RBK00027735}, this is an internal document. It's called a "Grenfell residents action plan", dated 15 June, a document created by your team, and it's the action points from a 9 o'clock briefing meeting on 15 June involving your team; is that correct?

A That's correct

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Q. If we focus on "Accommodation", we see:

"77 households currently placed in commercial hotels and 4 need to be moved today — alternative accommodation already found — more expected to approach."

If we move to the third point:

"Some bookings cannot be carried over to the weekend [ie to the Monday] and need to find alternative accommodation for 24 households."

About a third of the amount of people who had been placed at that stage. So, as we said, a significant amount of those initially placed had to be re—placed in other hotels; isn't that correct?

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- 1 A. That's correct.
- Q. Would you accept that this was highly disruptive and
 negatively impacted those that had been placed in those
 hotels initially?
- 5 A. Yes
- Q. Did the housing team clearly communicate to residents
 that there was uncertainty about the length of their
 current bookings?
- 9 A. It would depend on whether we had telephone numbers for 10 the people who were in those particular accommodation. 11 It was a very fluid situation, so we were talking to the 12 hotels all the time. Obviously people who left the 13 tower, some left with phones, some left with absolutely nothing. We did visit -- we did attempt to visit 14 15 everybody in the hotels who we'd placed on the Thursday 16 to talk to them about the placement and the -- and what 17 was going to happen over the next few days. But 18 obviously people weren't in, and so we, you know, kind 19 of -- we weren't able to speak to everybody on those 2.0 visits that we undertook on that Thursday.
- 21 Q. So it's a number of factors: it's the recognition that 22 those who left the tower had lost everything and may not 23 have a telephone number --
- 24 A. Yes.
- 25~ Q. $\,--$ a recognition that attempts were made to visit but

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no one was there, and using the hotel as a go-between.

Do you accept, within that context, that a number of those affected who were placed in hotels were unsure of how long their bookings were due to last?

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6 Q. Perhaps we could have a look at {RBK00020037/2}, please.
7 If we could scroll down, please, to the bottom of that
8 page, we see an email at 06.49, and this is from
9 Councillor Judith Blakeman. It's sent on the morning of
10 15 June to the BECC, copied to Mr Holgate, and it says
11 this:

"I have received an enquiry from a Grenfell Tower family currently housed in a hotel in Earl's Court.

They tell me that they have no idea if they will still be there tonight, they have nowhere else to go, are very worried and need some reassurance.

"Can you please let me know what is to happen to families currently in the hotels? I suspect this will not be the only enquiry we will receive unless they are given full information as soon as they get up."

If we scroll up {RBK00020037/1}, it was confirmed in the emails — the top of the page, an email you sent to your colleague, and the contact information for someone who would like a call about what's happening, that was William Thompson; is that correct?

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- 1 A. Yes.
- Q. Do you accept there were occasions where the first time
 a placed person or family in a hotel would learn they
- 4 needed to check out was when the hotel informed them,
 - and there wouldn't be information from RBKC?
- A. Yes, that may well have been the case, that the hotel
 spoke to the family and advised them that they wouldn't
 be able to stay.
- 9 Q. Another way of phrasing it is that they were told they
 10 need to leave, rather than they can't stay; isn't that
 11 correct?
- 12 A. I don't know what the hotels said to the people who were 13 in the hotels.
- Q. Yes. But you would accept it's not ideal that somebody
 in that situation is informed that their accommodation
 is no longer there and they need to leave or they cannot
 stay?
- 18 A. Absolutely, which was why we attempted to visit everybody on the Thursday, because they were being
- 20 placed there in an emergency situation on the Wednesday,
- when we were just trying to make sure that those people had somewhere safe to stay overnight on the Wednesday
- 23 night.
- 24 Q. Yes.
- $25\,$ $\,$ A. And so the intention was to go out and knock on

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everybody's door, or to contact people by phone if we had their numbers, in order to be able to let them know what the situation was and to give them information about how they could contact the housing department for more information.

Q. An example we looked at was on the night of 14 June.

Let's go to {RBK00002735/2}, please. There is an email at 06.27. So this is from Andrew Carter, who is the head of service, housing option services, and this is an email to you on that Saturday. "Urgent booking extension needed" is the subject:

"Dear all

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"This man told us he has to check out of the Metropole Hilton Edgware Road tomorrow. He wants to know if it will be extended."

That's Mr Farshid Karficheragh — hopefully I pronounced that correctly — and this is somebody from Grenfell Tower.

Can you explain why it seems to be those who were in -- the residents, an example here, who were in the hotels were either being told by the hotel or were contacting the housing department asking them about their booking and the fact that they were being told to check out?

25 A. I don't know why the hotels were informing them that

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they needed to check out. What we were doing in RBKC was to book as many rooms for as long as possible, and then we were probably reviewing the information about how long we had those rooms for at the time. But we were both placing people and managing the placement of people at the same time.

Q. Yes.

Let's scroll up in that thread, please, to the next email, and it probably follows from your answer. This is your email that evening, on Saturday at 7.19, and you say to your colleagues:

"I'm afraid I don't know who's on bookings but whomever is would you mind contacting the hotel and extending the hotel room booking and get the hotel to let him know."

Why would someone not try to ring this person individually and explain the position, having some direct contact, rather than going via the hotel?

A. I don't know if that person actually had a phone. We were still —— lots of people, as you can imagine, lost everything, and we were in the process of arranging mobile —— to give mobile phones to everyone who was affected by the fire, and in order —— we didn't have —— even if people did come out and did have their phone, we didn't necessarily have an up—to—date number for them.

So the information that we took on the day of placing someone in the fire may or may not have included their phone number, if they had one. We may or may not have had details from the TMO's database, but they may or may not have been up to date because people either didn't have their phones or they changed their phone number or we hadn't got an emergency phone to them.

So I had made the assumption there that —— I'd asked my team if they could extend the hotel booking, and I had made the assumption there that it was probably the quickest and most efficient way to let —— to ask the hotel to update that particular person that his room was going to be extended.

Q. In general terms, would it have been better to say at the outset, "We've booked this room for three nights and we'll try to extend it"? Was that the information that was going out, or was it, "This is your room", and there was uncertainty that followed?

A. I'm not entirely sure, because I wasn't speaking to the residents directly, about what information exactly we were giving people, but we were booking hotel rooms, continuing to book hotel rooms, and then trying our very best to maintain people in those same hotel rooms for as long as possible.

Whether we could contact each one of those persons

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in those hotel rooms individually in order to let them
know what we were doing, that's something that we did do
on the Thursday — we tried to do on the Thursday. But
whether we had that information to hand to constantly
have that rolling conversation with somebody, I suspect
we did not.

7 Q. We discussed a lot of the circumstances which you were 8 operating in, and was it the real position, actually, 9 that you, your department — specifically your 10 department — were overwhelmed with the volume of 11 bookings and rebookings that had to be made in those 12 first few days?

13 A. I would say it was overwhelming, yes.

Q. I want to move on to the provision of accommodation ——
emergency accommodation, of course, we're focusing
upon —— and the eligibility criteria, and what was in
place and arrived at on 14 June.

You set this out at paragraph 47 of your first statement, and perhaps we could open that up, please $\{RBK00035592/12\}$. This is what you say in your statement at paragraph 47, and then perhaps we can examine this a little bit further:

"By the night of 14 into 15 June, all Grenfell Tower residents whom the Council were made aware needed emergency accommodation were found hotel rooms.

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1 77 households were placed in 102 hotel rooms that night. 2 Anyone from Grenfell Tower who asked for a place were 3 offered hotels immediately and without question. 20 or 4 so people stayed overnight at the Westway Sports Centre. 5 As far as I was aware, they had all been offered hotel accommodation, but wanted to stay." 6

Is that the correct position?

- 8 A. That was my understanding.
- 9 Q. Does it remain your understanding?
- 10 A. Yes.

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- 11 O. You may be aware that RBKC, in their opening submissions 12 to this module, have said that the council acknowledges 13 that there's evidence of a small number of 14 Grenfell Tower residents not being told about this 15 option, ie hotel accommodation, in circumstances where they should have been. Do you accept that concession 16
- 17 which RBKC have made?
- 18 A Yes
- 19 Q. We have mentioned already the number of displaced 20 residents generally from the evacuated properties within 2.1 the police cordon, and we know that by the afternoon of 22 the 14th a number of 845 residents were unable to return 2.3 to their homes. We have heard that those properties. 2.4 amongst others, were known as the walkways, comprising

of Hurstway Walk, Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk. Is 73

- 1 that correct?
- 2. A. Yes.

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- 3 Q. What was the advice given to that group of residents, those within the umbrella of the walkways, not the 5 tower? What advice were they given in relation to the 6 provision of emergency accommodation on 14 June?
- 7 A. I don't remember, but in —— but I believe they were told 8 if they — they asked them if they could stay with 9 friends and family in the first instance, that would be 10 very helpful.
- 11 Q. I'm just going to summarise what you say -- in fact, we 12 have the statement here. Let's scroll down, please, to paragraph 49, and overleaf {RBK00035592/13}, please, the 13 14 last four lines:

"We said in the first instance that those living in the finger blocks should try to stay with friends and family. If they didn't have anywhere to go, we offered them hotels. Most of them did go to friends and family until the situation became clearer."

I'm just going to examine that a little bit more closely and assist you with some documentation.

Do you recall, by the afternoon of 14 June, the position that displaced residents from the wider cordon, the walkways, would be provided emergency hotel accommodation only if they were elderly or vulnerable?

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3 remember exactly how many flats were in the three finger 4 blocks, but in terms of our priority , it was for people

A. I think we were trying to prioritise people in order to

be able to find them accommodation. I don't -- I can't

5 who had nowhere to go and those residents whose homes had been destroyed by the fire. So in terms of order of 6

7 priority, we were looking to house those people who were vulnerable or had nowhere else to go. 8

9 Q. Let's assist your recollection with {RBK00018898}, 10 please. This is an email sent by you on 14 June at 11 13.46, and this is to Emma Strugnell, who was in the 12 media and communications team. "Accommodation":

> "We are directing people who are [a]ffected by the fire to the three emergency rest centres.

"We are providing emergency accommodation for people impacted in Grenfell Tower

Then in the third paragraph, the fourth line:

"We are advising people to go to the emergency rest centres advise the Housing staff who they are if they are old or vulnerable in anyway will seek to provide you with emergency housing, for everyone else we are waiting to see if they will be allowed to return to their homes or emergency rest centre accommodation will he needed '

Does that assist in terms of the history, the timing

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- 1 of the advice given to your members of staff?
- 2 A. Yes, it was. Yes, it was the advice given to the
- 3 members of staff when trying to find a considerable
- number of properties in a very short period of time, we
- 5 put in place a system whereby we sought to help those
- 6 who were most vulnerable in order to be able to provide
- 7 them with accommodation.
- 8 Q. Do you consider that advice to your staff to cascade, do
- 9 you think that decision and advice was clearly 10 communicated to residents in the wider cordon on
- 11
- 12 A. I don't believe there was any mechanism to advise
- 13 residents in the wider cordon of that advice. I believe
- 14 if people approached us, we were able to advise them of
- 15 that, but there wasn't a mechanism in order to be able
- 16 to disseminate that information more widely.
- 17 Q. One mechanism would be using social media channels, such 18 as Facebook or Twitter, and putting messages out there.
- 19 Do you know if that was done?
- 2.0 A. I don't.
- 21 Q. You talked about prioritisation of offering
- 2.2 accommodation, but was it actually the other way around,
- 23 that there was a decision to limit the offer of hotel
- 2.4 accommodation really because of the number of displaced
- 2.5 people?

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1 A. The sheer volume of people that may require 2 accommodation, there's a necessity in order to be able 3 to prioritise them in order to be able to target at 4 those that are the most vulnerable or unable to find anywhere else to stay. 5 Q. And it's touched upon there in your email which we just 6 7 read out that you were waiting to see if those who were 8 in the wider cordon would be allowed to return to their 9 homes. So at that stage, was there a hope or 10 expectation that those who were displaced in the wider 11 cordon would be allowed to return to their homes on the 12 night of 14 June? 13 A. Yes. I didn't know the condition of their properties at 14 that time, and I didn't know how long the police would 15 have that cordon in place. So it would appear from the 16 email sent at 1.45 on the 14th that it was my hope that 17 the cordon would be lifted and those people would be 18 able to go home. 19 Q. This is a cordon which was operated by the 20 Metropolitan Police Service. Can you tell us what was 2.1 done in relation to obtaining advice from the 22 Metropolitan Police Service regarding the relaxation of 2.3 the cordon? 2.4 A. I wouldn't have been responsible for contacting the 25 Metropolitan Police myself. I believe that would have 77 1 been information that would have come through the BECC or through other channels within the local authority. 2 3 I would have waited to have heard advice from the Metropolitan Police about what their decision was on the 5 cordon. That was not my decision and I did not have 6 an open channel of communication with the

Metropolitan Police.

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Q. If we could turn to {RBK00031298/3}, please. This is a long email chain. If we could go to page 3 of this document, please, to 14.50, there's an email at 14.50, and that's an email from Robert Shaw. It's to you and other people in your department, "Who we are accommodating - latest". 14 June, 14.50, and it says this:

"We are aware that residents in surrounding blocks have been evacuated ..."

Attaches a map of the area, includes the addresses which -- I have summarised some of those already. Scroll down:

"If residents of the cordoned area remain evacuated. it is likely they will be accommodated in a rest centre as it is likely to be only for one night UNLESS they are older, vulnerable etc. We WILL accommodate these.

"This is for your information only at this stage. I will update you as to any changes."

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Then a further email within this thread, if we move 2 up to 15.51, please, in the email thread, which is on 3 page 2 {RBK00031298/2}. This is Mr Shaw again at 15.51, 4 vou're copied in: "Hello 5 6 "An update:

7 "We will also accommodate the following who live in 8 the cordoned area:

"Families with children.

1.0 "Older persons.

"Vulnerable persons

12 "If you are at one of the rest centres and 13 identifying people for placement, please make sure you identify their vulnerability along with all the other 14 15

"Many thanks 16

"Rob."

18 So it appears from this by that stage that the 19 eligibility criteria had been extended to include 20 families with children; is that correct?

2.1 A. Yes.

2.2 Q. Was there any reason why they were not included in the 2.3 initial eligibility criteria?

2.4 I don't remember.

25 You can't remember whether it was an omission or

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1 a deliberate decision by prioritisation not to include 2

3 A. I don't remember, but my -- I would expect it was an omission rather than something that was a deliberate

5 decision not to place people with families and children

6 in that first cohort, and what Rob was doing was making 7

that clearer. $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ So this email we're looking at is 15.51, so near 8

9 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Were there efforts by RBKC 10 to update those who were affected who may have been in 11 contact with housing officers prior to that time about

12 the change in eligibility criteria for accommodation?

13 A. I'm sorry, I don't really understand your question.

14 Q. I'll rephrase it. I'm sure it's my fault.

15 So it's 15.51. The criteria has been extended to 16 include families with children.

17 A. Yes

18 Q. This is mid-afternoon.

19 In relation to those displaced people who had 2.0 families, who may have been in contact with a housing 21 officer at any time up until that change in policy, was 2.2 there contact made with them to say, "Well, things have 23 changed, there now is accommodation available"?

2.4 Not to my knowledge, no.

25 Q. If we follow this thread up, please, to the bottom of

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page 1 {RBK00031298/1}, back to this email, thank you 1 2 very much, we see at the bottom of page 1, from 3 Ryan Bird, Wednesday, 14 June, 16.21, that's the email 4 in the thread we're looking at, at the bottom of page 1, and if we turn over to page 2 {RBK00031298/2}, it says: 5 6 "Hello. 7 "Do TA ..." 8 Is that temporary accommodation? 9 A. Yes. 10 Q. "... know that we are placing none Tower?" 11 Does that mean non-tower? 12 A. I presume so. 13 Q. I will read it again so it makes some sense: "Do [temporary accommodation] know that we are 14 15 placing [non-]Tower? 16 "They [temporary accommodation] are telling our team 17 18 "Please clarify." Then if we go back to page 1 {RBK00031298/1} and 19 2.0 follow this thread, we see that at 16.23, Amanda Gill, your colleague: 2.1 22 "Yes I have spoken to Rachael. 2.3 "Westway is going to be the overnight rest centre." 2.4 The last thread that I want to focus on is if you

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just scroll up a little bit more, please, Ryan Bird

1 again at 16.32:

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3 "Many helpful but confused folk here.

"Lots of information but little of it entirely

Was it the case that, as a result of confusion internally about the eligibility criteria, that a number of those who met that criteria were initially not provided with temporary emergency accommodation on

A. It was a very fluid situation, with two teams who had been sent up to two rest centres, and a third team then sent to the Westway, in order to be able to manage the numbers of people that were approaching.

We were dealing with the police cordon, which, in the Town Hall, we weren't aware of where it was and how it was impacting on people, so in the first instance the message was to the people placing: place the people from the tower. As it became more obvious as the day went on where the police cordon was and who was impacted by it. then we adjusted, and meant that we would then place people who were affected by the wider cordon because we did not know when that cordon was going to come down.

But it may be the case that some people who had approached earlier in the day may have been given

1 information that meant that by later in the day, we had

changed our stance, but it was a very, very fluid

3 situation of not knowing who was going to be able to

4 stay out of their home and who was going to be able to

5 go back, and I think it's entirely reasonable to expect 6 changes in decision to have taken place over the course

7 of that day as the situation became crystallised.

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ Okay. So a lot in there. You gave your reasons why 8 9 matters developed as they did. But is it right that you 10 accept that that did occur, that there may have been

11 people who were not informed?

12 There may have been some people who initially were 13 informed that they would not have been placed, but by 14 later in the day, then that would have been the

15 decision, that they would have been placed.

16 Q. You said it's entirely reasonable to expect changes in 17 decision to have taken place over the course of the day 18 as the situation became crystallised. Would you also

19 accept it's entirely reasonable to expect that

2.0 the council communicate those changes of decisions so

that people understand that matters have developed?

22 A. Yes, I would accept that there was a need to communicate 2.3

to the people who were impacted by the fire and the 2.4 events about who we were going to place and for how

25 long. How we were going to communicate with them is

1 somewhat more difficult. You mentioned social media 2 but, as you'll be aware, lots of people left the tower 3 or left their accommodation with absolutely nothing, so access to social media, I should imagine, wasn't perhaps 5 as prevalent as it is if you were leaving your home and

6 had the ability to take things that you wanted to take

with you.

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8 Q. I'm just going to touch upon a couple of examples of the 9 confusion in the circumstances which you have explained 10 to us existed at that time.

> There is something called a crisis support team which was operating for RBKC; you're aware of that part of the department, is that correct?

A. Yes 14

15 Q. Perhaps you would accept from me that there was a report 16 that there was a 84-year-old man who had been evacuated 17 and was from the walkways, but notwithstanding his 18

contact with housing, he was considered at that stage

19 not eligible for accommodation; would you accept that 2.0 there were occasions where people were simply given the

2.1 wrong information?

2.2 A. Yes

23 A further example was Hicham Cherbika, who was 2.4 a resident from Grenfell Walk, who lived there with his 25 wife and three children, and he states this. I'm going

to summarise, but paragraph 33 of his statement, {IWS00001305/5}:

"... at 2PM, I went back to the Tower and I started hearing that the Westway was open and they were providing emergency shelter and support.

"34. I went to there, to Westway, but at first, they did not let me in because I was not from the Tower.

"35. They did not know that Grenfell Walk residents had been affected by the fire too. I explained that I lived in Grenfell Walk and that I had lost my house and everything inside. We had been evacuated and couldn't return. I told them that all I wanted was some powdered milk for our baby son ..."

He added $\{IWS00001305/6\}$ that two days later he contacted the council again:

"Nobody from the Council contacted us to tell us about the hotel accommodation until we contacted them."

So an occasion where somebody who had a family who was from the surrounding area, although very close to Grenfell Tower, who wasn't provided accommodation, and do you accept that he should have been contacted?

22 A. Yes.

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Q. Was the approach of RBKC, because of the circumstances
 you were operating in, that those who needed assistance
 really had to come to the rest centre or come to you as

0 [

1 an organisation to get assistance?

- A. Yes, they needed to make themselves aware that —— they needed to make themselves aware to us that they needed assistance, on that first day particularly.
- Q. We have heard of something called the Project Athena interview, an account which an internal interview provided by RBKC, and you touch upon this. I want to perhaps summarise it. The question was this in fact, let's open it up so it aids your recollection, {RBK00029012/8}, please, and the last question.

11 Thank you

We see that the person who is asking questions says:
"It wasn't you your [sic] responsibility to speak

with everyone and make sure they have somewhere, rather it was for them to come to vou?"

Then if you could turn overleaf {RBK00029012/9}, please, you say:

"Yes. Reactive. Not proactive. But TMO had called around everyone to see where everyone was, in their list of tenants. The scale of who needed what only became clear over the next few days."

You accept reactive not proactive at that stage as perhaps a fair description of what you had to do; is that correct?

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A. Yes, that's correct.

1 Q. I wonder if we could turn, please, to {RBK00019778},
2 please. This is in relation to information and key
3 messages, and communicating with those who were
4 displaced and affected by the fire.

This was drafted -- I can summarise the information we have -- around 2 o'clock on 14 June and circulated to RBKC staff, TMO staff, and staff from the Westway, and we can tell from emails that this was circulated between 14.43 and 15.12.

10 Are you familiar with this document, "Key Messages"?

11 A. Yes

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- Q. If we look at the bottom of the document, underparagraph 6, "Housing Plan":
 - "• If you are a Grenfell Tower resident then please go to one of the above rest centres or the Town Hall and we will provide you with emergency accommodation.
 - "• If you are a resident of any of the other blocks that have been evacuated due to the fire then please also go to the rest centres and make yourself known ... We are awaiting an update ...
 - "• If any residents of the evacuated blocks are vulnerable or elderly we will seek to provide you with emergency accommodation. However we would encourage people to stay with friends and family in the first instance until we have further information."

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So that was the information, "Key Messages",
an internal document shared amongst RBKC, TMO and those
at the Westway.

Do you know — you probably touched upon this already — whether that information was circulated elsewhere to those who were affected using social media channels or the websites of RBKC?

8 A. I don't know.

9 Q. Are you able to say that those displaced residents who 10 may be vulnerable or where English was not their first 11 language, do you know whether there was any consideration regarding their needs and communicating

12 consideration regarding their needs and communicating

with them?

14 A. I don't know.

Q. I want to deal with a topic of reports of those in the
 walkways where certain residents were sleeping rough, ie
 having nowhere to sleep.

Were you aware that there were reports late on 19 14 June of displaced residents sleeping rough?

A. I wasn't aware that anyone was sleeping rough. Therewas no need for anybody to sleep rough because the

Westway was open and available for people to stay there.

23 Q. So you weren't aware at the time?

24 A. No

 $25\,$ $\,$ Q. And you say that there was no need?

A. No, that's right. not come across people sleeping on the street around Q. In relation to that, from your perspective, as somebody 2 Verity Close. The police are standing down their day 2 3 who's worked for many years in a housing department, 3 shift. David Kerry contacted SUEZ ...' 4 somebody who's very senior at RBKC, would it cause you 4 Is it the cleaning part of the organisation? Is concern to hear, in the wake of such a serious incident. 5 5 that correct? that there were people who were displaced, affected by A. I believe so. 6 6 the fire, sleeping rough? 7 Q. "... to inform them about anti Council feeling ..." 8 And other matters which don't relate to this topic. 8 A. Of course. 9 Q. If we could turn to {RBK00029413}. This is the BECC 9 You mentioned that you weren't aware of these 10 10 log. It's in a spreadsheet, so it may take a little bit reports at the time; correct? 11 of time to open up. We are going to go to row 228, and 11 A. Yes between us we're going to navigate through this. It 12 Q. It appears that the report in the BECC wasn't isolated, 12 13 might take a little bit of time. It's at the far left. 13 and the TMO, who were, as you mentioned, making contact with residents, and indeed walkway residents, also 14 please, scroll down to row 228. 14 15 So at column A, we see the log number, and this is 15 recorded the following on 15 June. 16 log 58 and it records on 14 June at 23.30: 16 In relation to that, what I'm going to do is I'm 17 "Red Cross ... contacted to say that Red Cross staff 17 going to summarise their log. Perhaps you would accept 18 who are walking from RPC [Rugby Portobello, one assumes] 18 it from me, this is what came back from their 19 to Westway centre have seen people sleeping on the 19 2.0 2.0 A named individual from Barandon Walk was sleeping streets who don't appear to know about Westway being 21 a relief centre overnight. 21 in the park with his dog, and it appears the reason why 22 22 "Jack Duncton has asked Red Cross to share more was the concern for where his pet would go. 23 2.3 Were you aware of that? precise information re location and flag it with 2.4 David Carey.' 2.4 A No And that's a reference there, at 23.40, that 25 Q. Another named individual from Barandon Walk was recorded 89 1 volunteers had spotted rough sleepers on Verity Close. 1 as sleeping under the flyover. He stated he required 2 I'm just going to follow that through, as you said 2 accommodation and it was noted by the TMO officer that 3 that you weren't aware of that at the time, and see if 3 his mother will assist him to call RBKC. Maybe any of this assists your recollection. a suggestion of vulnerability . 5 5 We move up to the next row, which is row 227, Again, were you aware of that? 6 log 59. This is Jack Duncton again. 6 A. No. 7 7 Q. The last example I'd like to refer to you is a named Do you know who Jack Duncton is? 8 8 female resident from Testerton Walk, who had two sons A. No. 9 9 '... contacted onscene LALO to let police know that who were not adults. She was recorded to have staved in 10 there are potentially people sleeping out on 10 her car on 14 June, and over to the night of the 15th, 11 Verity Close ... " 11 and was advised to go to the Westway. 12 Are you familiar with Verity Close? 12 Again, it probably flows from your previous answers 13 A. Yes. 13 that you weren't aware of this? Q. "... and have asked police to go and check the area and 14 14 A. No, I wasn't aware of those individual cases. go to the Westway Sports Centre." Q. So regular contact with the TMO. This, if there were 15 15 16 If we turn to row 222, which is log 64, please, this 16 reports of homelessness, would be something of real 17 is at 00.45, from Guy Cullum, LALO. Item 2: concern. But it wasn't brought to your attention? 17 18 "He has spoken to a police officer on the cordons 18 A. It wasn't brought to my individual attention, no. 19 regarding people sleeping outside on Verity Close. The 19 Q. In relation to this ring-around, for want of a better 2.0 2.0 word, that the TMO were doing on 15 June, some of that police said they don't have the capacity to send an

"Guy Cullum LALO has been in touch to say that have 25 A. That's correct.

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contact also referred to a named resident not having

must be a reference to the housing line; is that

much luck with the temporary accommodation number, which

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Opus 2 Official Court Reporters

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been sent home."

officer. The police are winding down, officers have

log 73, so this is 01.30, 15 June, so overnight:

Finally, in relation to this, from row 213, please,

- 1 Q. Was that housing line operating 24 hours or was it limited?
- A. I don't remember. We did put a shift system in place
 quite quickly, but I don't know from 14 June to 15 June.
 We did have it manned from, I believe, 8 o'clock in the
 morning until 10 o'clock at night, but I don't believe
 it was manned overnight.
 - Q. There were also entries when this call—around was made where other tenants were staying with friends, and it was indicated that they required accommodation as they could only stay there for the short term.

So drawing that together, from that information, would you now accept that there were a number of displaced walkway residents, some with families, some potentially vulnerable, who had nowhere to stay for that first night on 14 June, and perhaps some of the later nights?

18 A. Yes.

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- Q. Do you accept that that was, in part, a consequence of
 this passive approach by RBKC, and poor communication
 regarding the eligibility criteria, both internally and
 externally, regarding temporary accommodation?
- A. I don't accept that it was our passive approach, because
 we were being extremely active at that time. By saying
 it was passive, you give the indication that we weren't

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- actually doing anything in order to be able to house as many people as possible.
- 3 Q. Yes.

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4 A. But we were, we were doing a great deal in order to be able to house people who approached us.

I do accept, from the evidence that you have put before me, that there were people who unfortunately did not receive the level of care that they should have done on that night of 14 June and, therefore, unnecessarily slept in their car or who slept out, but should have, if they could have known about it, been housed in the Westway overnight and then subsequently received the offer of emergency accommodation.

- 14 Q. Can I move on --
- A. I just want to say, I do not know, though, based on the evidence that you've provided, as to whether any of those three people that you've provided as evidence had the ability for us to contact them. So I don't know whether, even if we had been proactive, we would have had the ability to phone all of those people in order to be able to let them know what was available for them.
- Q. "Proactive" is perhaps a better word than "passive", in
 fairness to you, but in terms of being proactive, we
 know from the information I provided to you that there
 was a ring—around, so all these people who were

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1 contacted were contacted by telephone. So these were 2 perhaps people who were contactable.

- A. Well, in any housing management scenario, you have
 telephone numbers for people who live in your
 accommodation.
- 6 Q. Yes.

A. Whether those telephone numbers are up to date and whether you're able to get hold of people as part of that ring—around, as I believe there's a subsequent entry, is that it's not always possible to get hold of people or have up—to—date numbers and/or email addresses for them, because tenants are not obliged to give you their personal information, and nor should they if they don't want to.

Q. I'm going to move on to another topic, please, which is
 the consideration given to allow those walkway residents
 who were displaced in the wider cordon to return to
 their homes.

You indicate in your statement at paragraph 60 $\{RBK00035592/15\}$ that on 15 June, you had:

"... no idea as the day wore on whether 850 people
in the wider cordon could go home or whether we may need
emergency accommodation for those residents too. It was
not until quite late in the day that people could start
returning to their homes in the wider cordon."

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- 1 Is that correct?
- 2. A. Yes.

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- 5 could return to their home?
- A. It was not my decision, so I do not know what decision
 was taken by the Metropolitan Police on lifting the
 cordon to allow people to return home.
- 9 Q. Well, there's probably two factors there. Number 1 is 10 the cordon; if there is a cordon where people aren't 11 allowed to enter, that's beyond your control; correct?
- 12 A. Yes.
- Q. Then, when the cordon is lifted or relaxed or reduced,is then the decision whether it's appropriate or
- suitable for those people to return to the
- 16 accommodation; isn't that correct?
- 17 A. Yes. So the appropriateness would have been based on
- the information received from the people who were on the ground about the condition of those blocks.
- ground about the condition of those blocks.

 Q. And who were those people?
- 21 A. So the TMO --
- ZI A. So the livio
- 22 Q. Yes.
- 23 A. -- were on the ground and assessing the condition of the three finger blocks.
- 25 Q. You mention at paragraph 61 of your statement

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- 1 $\{RBK00035592/15\}$ that the TMO were on site and they were 2 doing assessments on 14, 15 and 16 June of the 3 accommodation, and you state at paragraph 61 of your 4 statement that it was their responsibility to check the
- 5 accommodation. A. That's correct.

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- 7 Q. That was your understanding?
- 8 A. That's correct.
- 9 Q. Did the TMO express any concerns to you, as head of 10 housing or RBKC Gold, regarding safety concerns or wider 11 reservations at that time regarding allowing residents 12 to return to their homes in the walkways during those 13 first three days?
- 14 A. I don't remember
- 15 Q. We could perhaps assist you with your recollection. If 16 you could turn to {TMO00869990}, please. We've seen 17 this before. It's a statement from Teresa Brown, who 18 I'm sure you know very well, or knew very well at the 19
- 20 A. Yes, I do.

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- 2.1 Q. Good working relationship with her?
- 22 A. Yes, she is an excellent officer.
- 2.3 Q. She was director of housing for the TMO.
- 2.4 If we turn to paragraph 45, please, which is page 9 25 {TMO00869990/9}, I'm just going to read it out:

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"I recall on 15 June having discussions with Stuart Priestley from RBKC BECC who had advised that consideration was being given at that time to return residents evacuated in the surrounding areas of the Tower. I recall discussing the possible impact on residents if this went ahead advising that if residents returned home they would have no gas/boiler, and consequently no hot water or cooking facilities, as the surrounding areas ran off the Tower's heating/hot water services. We also needed to repair damaged doors where the police had forced entry and I [Teresa Brown] suggested that returning residents should not be rushed back until we could ensure proper provision of services ...

And she gives examples how the door entry system also needed to be re-routed.

Were you informed of that advice by Teresa Brown, that returning residents on 15 June should not be rushed

A. I don't recall whether I received that information, but I do recall receiving information about the condition of the finger blocks and about the work that needed to be undertaken in order to be able to make those -- the accommodation -- to fix the doors, to fix the door entry system, to check for smoke damage, to check for flood

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place. And I was also very aware that the boiler for 3 the finger blocks was in the basement of Grenfell Tower 4 and, therefore, there would need to be an emergency or an alternative boiler system put in place in order to be 5

damage, and to effect the repairs that needed to take

- 7 Q. So on 15 June you had an awareness of these factors in 8 relation to heating, hot water --
- A. Yes. 9
- 10 $Q. \ \ --$ and in relation to likely damage to some of the 11 properties within the cordon and the walkways?

able to allow people to return.

- 12 A. Yes
- 13 Q. If we scroll down, please, to paragraph 48 of her statement, please {TMO00869990/9}. So she mentioned 14 15 earlier on speaking to Stuart Priestley, and Ms Brown 16 from the TMO savs this:

"At approximately 8pm on the 15 June, I was contacted by the BECC and asked to meet Police Inspector Bean at the Kensington Leisure Centre. This was to inspect the finger blocks area to examine whether all the areas that needed boarding up before residents returned were secure."

I will skip a little bit:

"I was advised on that inspection that the intention of Gold group [that would be RBKC Gold group] was that

1 finger block residents should be returned as soon as possible." 2

> Pausing there, were you aware of that, that the advice from RBKC Gold was that finger/walkway residents should be returned as soon as possible on 15 June in the

- 7 A. Yes, because I was hopeful that we wouldn't have to -that there was -- that we would want to try and have 8 9 people to be able to go home again as soon as they 10 possibly could.
- 11 Q. Ms Brown continues at paragraph 48:

12 "I repeated my concerns about it being premature due 13 to the lack of gas/heating etc, doors needing securing. Fire exits from the 300 blocks provided access directly 14 15 onto Grenfell Walk ..."

She gives a number of other reasons why.

17 She telephoned Sacha Jevans, who is also from the 18 TMO, isn't that correct?

19 A. Yes, that's correct.

2.0 Q. From site, from the location, who had the same 21 reservations.

'She said she [Sacha Jevans] would call

I'm going to read the rest of the sentence:

25 "Sacha [Jevans] called me back shortly after and

said that Laura said we had to go with the Gold group decision."

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So, in relation to that, did you have a conversation with Sacha Jevans where she relaved the reservations of the TMO, and specifically Teresa Brown at the scene. that it was premature, because of the condition of the property, for residents to be returned back to the walkways?

- 9 A. I don't recall the conversation, but if Sacha and Teresa 10 said the conversation took place, then it will have 11
- 12 Q. Finally, "we had to go with the Gold group decision". 13 specifically, do you recall saying that?
- No, but if Sacha says that I said that, then I'm quite 14 15 sure that I did.
- Q. If concerns were expressed by the TMO regarding the 16 17 state of the accommodation and it being premature, do 18 you think those concerns should have been taken into 19 account and heeded?
- 20 A. Yes, and I'm sure they were, in the context of -- set in 2.1 the context of trying to find the sheer volume of 22 accommodation for people that was required in London at 2.3 that time. So the alternative is either people can go 2.4 home and realise that it's far from perfect and there 25 are faults with it, or that they can stay in

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- 1 an emergency rest centre, and I think, you know, kind 2 of -- it's a very difficult decision to take when you're 3 looking for hundreds and hundreds of units of accommodation in a very busy capital city where there 5 isn't hundreds and hundreds of empty units of 6 accommodation to provide people with, that sometimes you 7 have to make very difficult decisions, which is about: 8 are people going to be able to go home, even though the 9 accommodation is not as perfect as we would like it to 10
- 11 Q. In the description we have heard you used the phrase 12 "not as perfect", but there were issues regarding 13 whether it was habitable, really; isn't that correct?
 - A. Yes, in terms of -- if it was not habitable then -- and if the feedback was that it's just not habitable, flood damage, fire damage, then nobody would have been made to go back. But if there was an issue of unfortunately not having hot water, heating being less of an issue because it was June, then it may have well been considered that it was reasonable for people to return home until that hot water provision could have been put in place. And I know that the TMO worked over the weekend of that weekend to ensure that all the doors were fixed and the door entry was fixed, and then there was a period of time over the following few days where an emergency

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- 1 boiler provision was put in place.
- 2 Q. In relation to this phrase "Gold Group decision", so
- 3 RBKC Gold Group decision -- and we know that that group
- 4 met twice on 15 June, and we will see the minutes in due
- course -- but it's a decision which doesn't appear to be 5 minuted within those meetings. 6
- 7 Do you recall -- and I know you may have given this 8 answer already -- at any stage outside those meetings
- 9 any contact with members of RBKC Gold regarding this
- 10 decision?
- 11 A. No.
- 12 Would you expect, as director of housing, to participate 13
- 14
- 15 Q. So is it likely, actually, logically, that you probably
- 16 did participate in that decision but don't recollect it 17
- 18 A. I think it highly likely that there was a discussion
- 19 that took place about what would happen if a further 300
- 20 people could not be returned to their properties or
- 21 could not go home, and what we sought to do in order to
- 22 $\mathsf{make} \ -- \ \mathsf{in} \ \mathsf{order} \ \mathsf{to} \ \mathsf{try} \ \mathsf{to} \ \mathsf{make} \ \mathsf{those} \ \mathsf{properties}$
- 2.3 available for people if they wanted to go back. It may
- 2.4 well be that lots of people -- and it's my understanding
- 25 that lots of people didn't go back, but it was about

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- 1 being able to lift the cordon and enable people to go
- 2 home, should they want to, and people would make that
- 3 choice. Some people would decide to go back and some
- people would decide not to go back.
- 5 Q. You mentioned 300, and I don't want to mislead you.
- 6 When it refers to the 300s, I think it's like one of the 7 walkways.
- 8 A. Yes, it is, yes.
- 9 Q. It's the numbers which are attributed to them, and for 10 short they're referenced as the 300s, or perhaps the
- 11
- 12 A. Yes, I understand that.
- 13 Q. I think we will touch upon in a moment the numbers of
- displaced people, so I don't want you to be misled about 14
- 15 that figure.
- 16 A. No, no, I understand that there was around 845 people,
- 17 families, who were in that wider area.
- 18 Q. Yes.

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- 19 Let's look at that last RBKC Gold meeting on the 2.0 15th at 15.30, which is {RBK00020448/1}. You're in
- 21 attendance, we see you there in the second line of 2.2 attendees
- 'Response priorities", we see that: 23
 - " ... 49 people in commercial accommodation from
- 25 Grenfell Tower [on 15 June].

1 " • Placed 103 people in total. Maybe placing more 2 as further request come in.'

> At this stage, this is before the telephone contact with Sacha Jevans later on, on 15 June at 8 o'clock, and it says this:

"If the cordon is not lifted, then have over 800 people to find places. Will need to seek help from Government."

Can you help in relation to what that means, "Will need to seek help from Government"?

- A. Well, if there's -- there would be no way that the borough would be able to source accommodation for 800 people. That is an enormous amount of people, who live in a very small geographic area, who would need either a rest centre or somewhere to stay overnight, and there's just no way that RBKC would have that capacity and/or I believe that probably number of units were available in London on that night. So it would become something that we would need help from government in order to be able to do.
- 2.1 Q. I understand the reasons as you set them out, but what 2.2 sort of help do you think was envisaged the government 2.3 could provide, central government could provide?
- 2.4 A. I think in that statement I mean we would need to 25 contact government and make them aware that it wasn't

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- 1 just the people from Grenfell Tower who needed to be 2 rehoused, but there was a wider and bigger problem with 3 the people in the wider estate who needed to be found accommodation, either for a short period of time or 5 a medium period of time, and what assistance could they offer. I don't work in government so I'm not sure what 6 7 they could have said to me.
- $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ You are director of housing, as we have mentioned a number of times. It's the second day of the RBKC 10 response. There is a lot of negative coverage of the response, which you touch upon and which is mentioned in other statements, and criticisms of the council at that stage: isn't that correct?
- A. Yes 14

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- 15 Q. You mention how hard your team is working. But looking 16 at the scale of the task you faced, did you not think that RBKC needed more assistance? 17
- 18 A. Looking at it in hindsight, after the event, then 19 clearly more assistance would have been extremely 2.0 helpful. At that time, I would say it was very much in 21 the housing department; head down, let's just keep 2.2 going, we need to be booking hotels, rebooking hotels, 2.3 placing people as they approach, logging all of the 2.4 offers that we're receiving, seeing how useful they are,
 - and then seeing how we can help the people who are

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approaching us.

- 2 Q. You were asked questions earlier this morning regarding 3 the morning of 14 June and any advice which David Kerry 4 gave to the chief executive/town clerk of RBKC that this was too big, effectively, for RBKC and to seek external 5 help, which I've summarised. 6
- 7 Were you aware on 14 or 15 June of the assistance 8 that could be provided to RBKC, such as the London Local 9 Authority Gold resolution?
- 10 A. No. I wasn't.

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- 11 Q. Do you recall any discussions with Nicholas Holgate or 12 at these meetings amongst RBKC leaders as to activating 13 the London Local Authority Gold on 15 June?
- A. No, I don't recall a discussion about that. 14
- 15 Q. So we've just been looking at the afternoon of 15 June, 16 and just perhaps to track the numbers of those who were 17 being placed, to use a clinical term, hopefully not 18 an insensitive term, if we could turn to {RBK00020703}.
 - So this is highlighted, and that's the way it's provided, it's not highlighted by us, so ignore the highlighting, and these are the minutes of the group meeting at 10 o'clock that day. You are there, we can see from page 1.
- 2.4 If we see the top of page 2 {RBK00020703/2}, under 2.5 paragraph 4:

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- "... Strategic Priorities 1
 - "Looking after those immediately affected
- 3 " • 109 families have [been] placed in commercial accommodation, 30 families are from the finger 5 blocks ... "

And then it says, third bullet point:

- 7 "Some families did return to their homes last night.
 - There is no hot water and heating in the re-occupied blocks. The TMO are looking to install temporary boilers. There were broken doors, debris and flooding which the TMO are working on resolving. RB ..."
 - Robert Black; is that correct?
- A. Yes. 13
- $\mathsf{Q}.\;\;"\dots\;$ to advise the BECC once the temporary boiler is in 14 15 place.
- 16 " • LJ [you] to supply the number of families 17 evacuated from [Grenfell] Walk."
 - Is that correct?
- 19 A. Yes
- 2.0 Q. Then if we go down, please, to the seventh bullet point, 21 which savs:
- 2.2 "L.I confirmed ..."
- 23 So still in that section -- have you got that, "LJ 2.4 confirmed"?

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25 A. Yes, I do.

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Q. "... she has sufficient hotels to accommodate up to 20 families. She will house the vulnerable or those with children without hot water but others will have to manage."

5 Is that correct?

A. Yes. 6

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7 Q. Was that the view, that you're doing the best you can, but other people will just have to get on with it, 8 9 they'll have to manage? That's correct?

10 A Yes

11 Q. What was the timeline for installing these temporary 12

13 A. The -- I don't know, to be honest with you, I don't 14

15 Q. Is it fair to say that it took a significant period of 16 time, probably more weeks than days, to install 17 temporary boilers?

18 A. I think it did take longer. It was first spoken about 19 as the situation became apparent about the lack of hot 20 water in the finger blocks, and then an assessment 2.1 needed to be made of, in engineering terms, how 22 difficult or how easy it was in order to hook up 2.3 a temporary solution, and that situation again was quite

worked out what the solution was.

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fluid as the TMO and Westminster, who were assisting,

- 1 Q. A fluid situation, a complex situation.
- A. Very complex. 2
- 3 last a considerable period of time, even at that stage.
- A. I couldn't say with any certainty that there was
- a timeline placed on how long it would take to put the 6 7 temporary boiler solution in place. I had no view at
- 8 9 Q. In relation to those who were returned to their homes.
- 10 in the walkways, who didn't have hot water or heating, 11 or gas to cook, putting aside it being June and being 12 warm, but just actually being able to cook, what

13 alternative provisions were made for those people?

- 14 A. So we were looking to put in place providing people with 15 financial assistance, I believe, in order to be able 16 17 I believe there were showers available in the sports 18
- 19 Q. So that being the Westway?
- A. The Westway and/or they —— the Kensington Academy(sic) 2.0 2.1 Leisure Centre. But I believe actually at that time it

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- 2.2 was still being used by the police.
- 23 Q. Yes, probably the Westway
- 24 A. Probably the Westway, yes.
- 2.5 Q. I'm just going to move on to another topic, actually

probably staying in the same theme about the numbers of households and people being accommodated.

3 I'm going to summarise what you say at paragraph 50 4 of your statement {RBK00035592/13}, saying that:

> "We still had many people approaches us on day 2 and 3 [Thursday and Friday, 15th and 16th] which included Grenfell Tower residents as well as people from the finger blocks [walkways] who required re-housing."

9 As those numbers increased, was it the case that it 1.0 was a real struggle to keep up with the increase in

11 demand?

12 A. Yes

13 Q. So we have heard already that, by the end of 14 June, 77 households were provided with hotel accommodation, 20 14 15 stayed in a rest centre. We have touched on that 16 already. But by 20 June, the 12 o'clock RBKC Gold Group 17 meeting minutes, which I can summarise —— it's 18 $\{RBK00017570\}$ — reported that a total of 250 households had been placed, with 125 from Grenfell Tower and 19 2.0 Grenfell Walk, and 112 from the broader cordoned area. 21 So lots of numbers there, but really from the first

day, 77 households, and by day 6, approximately day 7, it increases to 250 households, and amongst those, 112 from the broader cordoned area. Does that sound

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area in the end were placed in temporary accommodation.

Q. So a significant amount of people in the wider cordon

Q. And by temporary accommodation, we mean hotels.

Q. I've got time to deal with offers of accommodation,

which you mentioned earlier on this morning, receiving

offers of accommodation, and perhaps I can deal with

Is it correct that, from 14 June onwards, RBKC

from members of the public, other local authorities.

housing associations, charities, businesses, and indeed

Q. Was it the view of RBKC's housing team, led by you, that

terms of location and compliance, in terms of the

cleanliness, fire safety and other standards?

hotel accommodation was the most appropriate option in

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received a substantial number of offers of accommodation

- 1 A Yes
- Q. And one which, perhaps, in fairness, was envisaged to
- 5
- - that point whether it would take hours or days or weeks.
- - to -- so that they could go and get food elsewhere, and
 - centre.

- 21 Yes. The accommodation that was being offered -- very 2.2
 - generously, I have to say -- by lots of people who

A. That's correct.

A. That's correct.

that in short.

hotels?

A. Yes

- 23 obviously had seen the news and were horrified by what 2.4 was taking place, was, you know, kind of overwhelming in
- 2.5 terms of people's kindness, and I must say that, that it

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was, you know, kind of -- it was -- you are quite humbled by what people offer in those kind of circumstances. But to stay -- to have someone who's highly traumatised to come and stay in your house in a spare bedroom didn't really feel like the right solution for me, when what people probably needed was a self-contained room and their own bathroom and the ability to, you know, try and think about what had just happened.

In the case of accommodation that was offered by other registered providers and/or by other councils, these would be accommodation that was unfurnished in existing social housing blocks, and so it wasn't just a case of being able to say to somebody, "You can go and -- we've got a flat for you in -- on the 10th floor of a block in Wandsworth". That really didn't feel like the right solution either, because they would be unfurnished accommodation, may not be the right size for that family, and may not be where that family wanted to be, and so that was very much accommodation that needed to be considered in the medium term as an alternative, but not in the short term, where people needed clean bedding, a warm place to stay, their own bathroom, and the ability to be as close as possible as they could to

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- Q. So you have set out in your statement and your answer the rationale and why the decision was made and focusing on hotel accommodation. You also mentioned the humbling and overwhelming response from members of the public.
- 5 A. People are very, very kind.
- 6 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Q}}.$ And those offers, is it right, from members of the 7 public, were made by both phone and email to RBKC?
- 8 A. That's correct.

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- 9 Q. Was there an issue with the volume of offers, with 10 managing those offers and the receipt of offers?
 - A. There was a huge number of offers and I believe that we acknowledged every single offer that was received, maybe not on the same day or the next day, but we did have a process in place whereby myself or my colleague acknowledged the very kind offers that people had given us, and we started to log all of those offers on the second -- on the 15th, we had a separate team who were looking at logging all of the offers and the suitability of those offers, in the context of: people won't be able to stay in hotels for longer term, and we need to start thinking about where people are going to move to in the medium term.

I'm also aware, because, as you've mentioned, I was the director of housing at RBKC for eight and a half years, the very low number of vacancies or voids that we

- 1 get in our housing stock on an annual basis. So K&C
 - used to do around 400 lettings a year, on average, and
- 3 60% of those were bedsits and one beds. Now, I'm aware
- 4 of that situation when I'm receiving offers from other
- 5 providers. I'm also aware of the mix of families and
- the different family types that people -- will need to 6
- be accommodated, and I know that we just won't be able 8 to accommodate everybody who has been displaced by the
- 9 Grenfell fire within RBKC.
- 10 Q. So as kind as those offers were, in particular from 11 members of the public, they were never going to be
- 12 utilised for the reasons you've expressed?
- 13 A. They won't be suitable. They were extremely kind and
- 14 extremely well meant, and perhaps in different
- 15 circumstances we would have been able to use them, but
- 16 in this instance, it was my belief -- and it's still my
- 17 belief — that hotel accommodation was probably the best
- 18 place to put people in this scenario.
- 19 Q. In relation to that decision about offers of 20 accommodation from the public, was this decision
 - communicated to the public via the media communications
- 22 team or an automated message, perhaps, on the housing
- 2.3 line, that, "Thank you, but we don't require any offers
- 2.4 of temporary accommodation"?
- 2.5 A. I don't think there was a message sent out. If there

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- 1 was -- there's a fine balance to strike in that
- 2 situation, isn't there, of being very grateful for
- 3 people's very kind offers, and then appearing not to
- want them. You know, there's a balance to be struck
- 5 between being grateful for those offers, and some of
- 6 them could have been extremely useful, and then turning those offers away. 7
 - - So there's a balance to be struck about how you receive people's offers.
- 10 Q. I'm going to move on and make a start on a new section,
- 11 which is really the adequacy of the emergency
- 12 accommodation which was provided to those affected in 13 those first seven days, which is the framework for the
- immediate aftermath we are exploring. 14
- 15 You mention that Rachael Dalton, who was part of the 16 housing team, was in charge of the team which matched
- 17 the needs of those requiring accommodation with
- 18 available accommodation; is that correct?
- 19 A. Yes.

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- 2.0 Q. On your account, there was an effort to match needs with 21 what was available.
- 2.2 Yes, that's correct. We were looking at family
- 23 composition and type and hotel, and people were making
 - us aware of any disabilities or vulnerabilities, and
- 2.5 trying our best to try and match that.

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- 1 I admit that we probably did not get it right in 2 every circumstance, but, as I said, there was a lot of 3 people coming in and we were booking a lot of rooms and 4 trying to get people into somewhere as quickly as possible, to make sure that they were safe and were 5 6 accommodated.
- 7 Q. Was any consideration in those early days given to the 8 floor the accommodation would be on, placing somebody, 9 for instance, in a high floor in a hotel?
- 10 A. I don't think probably in the first few days that that 11 was a consideration, but I think that became 12 a consideration as it went on, as it became more 13 apparent to us how traumatised people were and how, 14 quite rightly, they just couldn't face being, you know, 15 kind of in a flat, or in a higher floor -- floored 16 accommodation, balanced against: this is what we've got 17 available, you know.
- 18 Q. Yes. In those first few days, you accept that it became 19 apparent some residents were placed in the upper floors 20 of high-rise hotels, and there was feedback that that was traumatising? 2.1
- 2.2 A. Yes, and guite understandably so as well.
- Q. At what stage do you think there was this recognition 2.3 2.4 and change in the placing of those who were 25 understandably traumatised in lower floor hotel

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- 1 accommodation? Can you say?
- 2 A. No, not with any great certainty. I would say that we 3 started to receive feedback from people and then started to react to that. I wouldn't say in the first instance it was a consideration that we said, "We are not booking 5 6 any towers -- hotel towers", but as it became aware --7 as we became aware of it, then we started to adjust our 8 booking policy. 9
 - Q. In fairness to you, you said in the first few days there wasn't a consideration, and perhaps consistent with an email which I can summarise. 18 June, so the weekend, 09.48, Rachael Dalton -- I'm just going to give the reference, $\{RBK00031672\}$ — to members of the housing team, setting out a number of tasks, and says this:

"Quick thoughts, that you're probably all already working on. We need to go through all the extensions today and move those on the higher level floors."

So, as you say, first few days, not a consideration, and then thereafter efforts made to move those affected --

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- 21 2.2 A. Yes.
- 23 Q. -- where possible.
- 24 A. Yes.

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2.5 Q. In the first seven days, did those assigning hotel 1 rooms, such as Rachael Dalton's team, take into account

- the specific needs of those affected, such as
- 3 adaptations for mobility issues, or facilities for
- 4 cooking, or the provision of appropriate sleeping
- 5 facilities for those with young children?
- A. I think we tried to. I'm not sure that we got it right 6 7 on every occasion, and I know there were families who
- 8 subsequently came back to us and said there weren't
- 9 sufficient beds in the room. When we were made aware of 10 it, we moved people. But we were certainly trying in
- 11 the first instance to provide people with the
- 12 appropriate size of accommodation that they needed.
- 13 So your evidence, in summary, is: "Yes, we tried" --
- 14 A. We tried, but we probably didn't get it right in every 15
- 16 Q. And perhaps a bit more than that, perhaps an acceptance
- 17 that you didn't get it right, and to assist you, I'm
- 18 just going to refer to some examples in general terms,
- 19 because the Inquiry's heard extensive oral and written
- 2.0 evidence of the experience of those who were placed in
- 21 hotel accommodation in those first few days, references
- 22 to families placed in one room which was far too small
- 23 for a number of family members: allocations that did not 2.4 take into account that there was an infant child.
- 25 including one family placed in a room with no cot or

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- 1 other baby facilities; and the needs of those with
- 2 disabilities, such as the family of Mohammed Rasoul, who 3 we have heard live evidence from, and his elderly
- father, who, on his account, had not been taken into 5
 - account or sufficiently catered for.
 - With those examples, do you accept that, in those first seven days, there was actually a significant
- 8 number of those placed who did not have their needs
- 9 sufficiently or appropriately catered for?
- 10 I couldn't say whether this phrase "significantly", but
- 11 there were certainly a number of families who wouldn't
- 12 have had the correct size of room and/or had the
- 13 facilities available to them, and we amended that over
- 14 the coming days and weeks as the situation changed. But 15 we did our very best to try and place people somewhere
- 16 in a very difficult situation, and we didn't get it
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- right in every occasion, and for that I can only
- 18 apologise, because it certainly wasn't the intent.
- 19 Q. Really on the last part of this section, and then we'll 2.0 perhaps pause, is that: do you accept that a number of
- 21 people who were placed in hotels in those early days
- 2.2 were actually not provided transport to the hotels and
- 23 had to make their own wav?
- 2.4 I'm not -- to be honest with you, I don't remember what
- 2.5 the transport situation was. On the first day, we

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1 attempted to get taxis to take people from the site to 2 their hotels. This was extremely difficult to do, 3 because there was obviously an enormous number of 4 emergency vehicles, but there was also a huge media 5 scrum which was preventing us from getting taxis through, and a huge number of representatives from the 6 7 media who were desperate to speak to people who were 8 bereaved and who had been through that awful experience, 9 and we were also trying to protect people from having to 10 undergo that interrogation. 11

So on the first day, I know we attempted to get people taxis. I can't honestly say that I remember on subsequent days what provision we made for people to be able to go to the hotels.

- Q. But those difficulties $\,--\,$ we have heard evidence from Mr Al-Karad who, on 15 June, attended the Westway to seek temporary accommodation. He received a phone call. and he had to rely on the kindness of a stranger to get a lift to a hotel in Earl's Court, for example. Do you accept that there were situations where people didn't get transport arranged by RBKC?
- 2.2 A. I accept that. I'm sure that my team, if they could 2.3 have arranged a taxi, would have arranged a taxi, but 2.4 that probably didn't happen in all cases.
- 25 MR KEATING: Mr Chairman, is that a suitable moment?

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1 ${\sf SIR}\ {\sf MARTIN}\ {\sf MOORE-BICK};\ {\sf Yes,\ thank\ you\ very\ much}.$ 2 Well, there you are, it's time we stopped now for 3 a break for lunch. So, as I say, we'll stop there. We'll resume, please, at 2 o'clock. As before, please 5 don't talk to anyone about your evidence while you're 6 out of the room. All right? THE WITNESS: Thank you. 7

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SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.

(Pause)

10 Thank you very much. 2 o'clock, then, please.

11 Thank you.

12 (1.00 pm)

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13 (The short adjournment)

14 (2.00 pm)

15 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: All right, Ms Johnson, ready to 16 carry on?

THE WITNESS: Yes. 17

18 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Good, thank you.

19 Yes, Mr Keating.

2.0 MR KEATING: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

> I'm going to move on to a separate topic, please, Ms Johnson, which is staff visits to hotels, something you referred to a couple of times this morning

In relation to staff visits, RBKC staff visits, were

they housing officers or social workers or a combination

of both, or was it just housing officers?

2 A. On the Thursday after the fire, it was just housing 3 officers

4 Q. Okay. So let's deal with that. It's on 15 June, the 5 Thursday, and housing officers being sent to hotels. You mentioned before that they were tasked to check on 6 7 residents.

Was that to assess their needs for short and long-term housing, or was it a welfare check?

10 A. It was more of a welfare check, really, to be honest, 11 just to see how they were and to ask if they needed 12 anything. If we were missing any information on the 13 family composition, then we could have taken it at that 14 time. But people were rehoused -- well, offered 15 emergency accommodation in very difficult circumstances, 16 so it was an opportunity just to see how people were.

17 Q. Perhaps we could open your first statement, please,

18 {RBK00035592/17}, at paragraph 67.

We see there:

"I arrived at the Town Hall [on the 16th] ... We had a morning briefing with senior officers from the Housing team. Feedback from officers was that many families weren't in their rooms when officers attended on 15 June, so it wasn't a very successful endeavour. We had put a letter under their door saying we had come to

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1 see them, and how to contact us, if they were not in." 2. Is that correct?

A. Yes

3 4 Q. According to Amanda Gill, your colleague, in her statement, prior to RBKC officers being deployed on 5 6 15 June to attend hotels, the council was made aware 7 that residents of Grenfell had called a meeting for that 8

afternoon at Rugby Portobello Club and actually had 9 requested RBKC to attend. 10 In relation to that, there was a view to send

housing officers out to the hotels to do a welfare check, as you described it, but you also were made aware in the housing department that there was a meeting going on at the Rugby Portobello Club. Was consideration given to likely unavailability of a number of residents before officers were sent to the hotels?

17 A. Yes, which is why we gave people -- why we sent them 18 with a letter to slide underneath the door. I'm not 19 sure I related the two events together, to be honest 2.0 with you, at the time, of the meeting of residents at 21 Rugby Portobello and people not being in their rooms.

2.2 In relation to the letter, a number of residents who 23 have provided evidence refer to not receiving any such 2.4 letter under their door. Are you confident that letters 25

were placed under all of the doors of the residents who

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- 1 were placed in hotels?
- 2 A. I've said we put a letter under the door, and if my
- 3 colleagues said they put a letter under the door, then 4 I have no reason to think that they didn't.
- 5 Q. We will return to that in due course.
- We've heard that this borough and North Kensington 6 7 was rich in diversity. Was the letter that was provided in advance translated into various languages spoken by 8 9 residents from that locality?
- 10 A. I don't believe so. I believe it was just in English.
- 11 Q. So in relation to what we just read about the feedback, 12 that this was not a very successful endeavour to make 13 contact with those affected residents placed in hotels.
- was there further attempts by RBKC to visit the 14
- 15 residents after 15 June?
- A. I was only responsible for the operation up until Sunday 16 17 the 18th, so I don't know if there was any further 18 attempts made after that weekend.
- 19 Q. Okay. So we were talking about Thursday the 15th.
- A. Yeah, so there wasn't on the Friday or on the Saturday. 20
- 2.1 Q. Okay, and on the Sunday you say that you --
- 2.2 A. I was stood down from being in charge of the operation.
- Q. So for that period, if somebody wasn't met or seen or 2.3
- 2.4 contacted face-to-face on 15 June, it was unlikely that
- 25 there was any contact on the 16th or 17th?

- 1 A. Unless they contacted us, or unless we were aware that 2 they wished to speak to us.
- 3 Q. I want to turn to -- you talked about placement of
- hotels, looking at RBKC and surrounding boroughs, and
- 5 one of those boroughs, of course, neighbouring boroughs,
- was the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham; isn't 6
- 7 that correct?
- 8 A. Yes
- 9 Q. Displaced residents from RBKC were placed in hotels in 10 that borough; isn't that correct?
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- 12 Q. Kim Smith, who was the chief executive, and still is chief executive of the London Borough of Hammersmith and 13 14 Fulham, in her evidence, which I'm going to summarise, 15 she has provided a statement to the Inquiry, she became 16 aware on 16 June 2017 that displaced RBKC residents had 17 been placed in their borough, and we will see in 18 a moment, in an email, concerns were raised with her 19 regarding a particular Grenfell Tower displaced resident who needed support. That reference is $\{LBH00000001/16\},$ 2.0
 - paragraph 63. In relation to RBKC residents placed in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, can you recall whether, actually, Hammersmith and Fulham were informed residents had been placed in their borough, in hotels in

that borough?

- 2 A. I did not tell London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
- 3 that we had placed people in their borough, but we were
- 4 part of a tri-borough arrangement.
- 5 Q. Yes

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- A. So RBKC had a number of linked services with Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster City Council, and so although
- 7 8 I hadn't taken responsibility for contacting Hammersmith
- 9 and Fulham to let them know, Hammersmith and Fulham may
- 10 have known because of the links with adult social care.
- 11 which was a tri-borough service, I believe.
- 12 Q. In relation to housing, that was solely RBKC, it was 13
- a sovereign service; isn't that right? 14 A. Housing was a single-borough service. Adult social care
- 15 and children's services were both tri-borough services.
- 16 And social workers at this point, by the 15th, were
- 17 starting to be mobilised to make links with people who
- 18 had been placed in accommodation.
- Q. Well, let's move to {RBK00021897/2}, please, and the 19
- 20 bottom of the thread at page 2. So we see
- 21 Gerry Crowley, the property and place manager at London
- 22 Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and an email to
- 23 Kim Dero, Kim Smith, who got married, and others on
- 2.4 19 June 2017
 - If we could go down, please {RBK00021897/3},

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1 thank vou:

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- 2 "We have been in touch with [Kensington and Chelsea]
- 3 this morning and I can confirm that they have placed tenants from Grenfell Tower in a total of 26 commercial
- 5 hotels of which 3 are located in the following
- 6 [Hammersmith and Fulham] hotels."
 - Then they're listed.
 - If we move down to, "In the meantime", that paragraph:
- 10 " ... we have visited all three hotels today and 11 spoken with hotel management, tenants and support 12 staff '

The date is 19 June, three days later. So:

- $^{\prime\prime}\ldots$ we have visited all three hotels today and 14
- 15 spoken with hotel management, tenants and support staff.
- 16 We have found inconsistent levels of service being
- 17 provided to tenants at the hotels, for example, the
- 18 families at the Ibis have an open tab with regards to
- 19 food and bar, the Holiday Inn families have been
- 2.0 provided with £500 and have access to breakfast. My
- 21 main concern is for the tenants residing at the
- 2.2 Premier Inn in Hammersmith. There are 12 families who
- 23 not been contacted by K&C since placement almost 6 days
- 2.4 ago. We were the first to visit them at the hotel.
- 2.5 They have no idea regarding what happens next and have

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not been provided contact details for K&C. They receive 2 meals per day — breakfast and dinner but have not received any cash subsistence."

So in relation to that and those 12 families which were placed in Hammersmith and Fulham, do you accept that, six days later, they haven't been contacted or visited by RBKC?

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- 9 Q. Accepting your involvement and responsibility in terms
 10 of controlling certain matters changed on the Sunday of
 11 the earlier week, which would have been 18 June, this is
 12 19 June, but can you explain how this occurred, how so
 13 many days had passed and how those people were left with
 14 no support?
- 15 A. I don't know what day they were placed. So this email 16 indicates that they were placed on the 14th. If they 17 were there, we would have attempted to visit them on the 18 16th or the 15th. If they weren't there, then we would 19 have hopefully put a letter underneath the door. 2.0 although I don't have an audit trail to say how many 21 letters were put in, put under, and then Friday and 22 Saturday my officers did not then do another phone—around, nor did they not (sic) do a visit of 2.3 2.4 people in those hotels, so I can't comment on what 25 happened from the Sunday after that.

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- Q. So in relation to the leaflet, it says here in stark terms they've "not been provided contact details for [Kensington and Chelsea]", which suggests no leaflet was placed underneath the doors.
- A. Yes, it does. It suggests quite strongly and I have no reason not to believe it that those families were placed and then they hadn't heard from us again and they had not contacted us either.
- 9 Q. Just the last part, "and they had not contacted us 10 either", what makes you say that?
- 11 A. Because they said they had had no contact with 12 Kensington and Chelsea, so I would presume that if they 13 had spoken to Kensington and Chelsea, that they had 14 phoned us, then they would have relayed that message 15 back to the people from Hammersmith and Fulham to let 16 them know that they had actually spoken to K&C and were 17 aware of the payments we were making and/or how long 18 they were able to stay in that particular hotel.
- Q. Do you acknowledge that this shouldn't have happened and
 leaving these families in this position was
 unacceptable?
- A. Yes, I acknowledge it must have been extremely difficult
 for those families to be left in that state of limbo,
 not knowing what was going to take place next.
 - Q. "Abandoned" is a word that the Inquiry has heard to

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1 describe how those placed in hotels felt. Do you

- accept, both at hotels within the borough and outside
- the borough, that communication and contact with those people in hotels was deficient?
- people in notes was deficient?

 A. Yes. I acknowledge that we could have done more to contact those families in those hotels to make sure that

they knew what was taking place. As I said, it was

- a very pressurised environment, with people constantly popularity approaching and us constantly booking, and perhaps we
- $\begin{array}{ll} 10 & \quad \mbox{didn't give enough attention } -- \mbox{ not perhaps; we didn't} \\ 11 & \quad \mbox{give enough attention to the people who had been placed} \end{array}$
- and giving them information and updates about what they could expect.

14 Q. Thank you.

I'm going to move on to another subtopic, which is the provision of food.

Once residents were placed in hotels, you set out in your statement at paragraph 84 {RBK00035592/23} that RBKC had an arrangement with some hotels which gave either full board, half board or just breakfast to the residents that were staying there. Is that correct?

- A. Yes, it depended on the services that that hotel provided.
- Q. Yes. But there was an effort to provide food when there was a placement made?

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- had been placed there, but obviously lots of hotels only provide limited services.
- 5 Q. In relation to dietary requirements of residents,
- 6 bearing in mind, as I said, the rich diversity of the
- 7 area of North Kensington we're dealing with and the time
- 8 of year it was, during Ramadan, were there any
- 9 arrangements made with those hotels for specific and
- 10 religious dietary requirements?
- 11 A. I don't remember us making that specific request when we
- were booking the hotels on 14 June. We were very aware of the wide cultural diversity in Grenfell and we knew
- that a lot of people, of course, were fasting at that
- 15 time. To be honest, I don't remember what we said to
- those hotels at that point in time about dietary
- requirements, but we were aware that not all hotels
- requirements, but we were aware that not all notels
- would be able to provide a full board service, nor would
- 19 they be able to provide food that necessarily people
- $20\,$ wanted to eat. You know, people have a wide --
- you know, kind of wide dietary requirements and likes
- and dislikes, and children, of course, eat at different
- times and want to eat earlier, so that's why we started
- 24 to mobilise very quickly trying to provide people with
- $25\,$ money in order so that they could both feed -- you know,

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go out and get food for themselves, but also, you know, kind of buy basic services and needs.

Q. RBKC, in their opening submissions to this module of the Inquiry {Day263/130:11}, have stated that:

"The council admits that it should have done more in the immediate aftermath to make people from diverse backgrounds feel as comfortable as possible, in particular Muslim residents who were observing Ramadan at the time. The council acknowledges that many survivors who stayed in hotels were not provided with Halal food.'

Do you accept that?

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- 13 A. Yes, we would have been reliant on the hotels in order 14 to be able to make that provision, and if they couldn't 15 make that provision, then unfortunately those people 16 wouldn't have been able to receive the food that they 17 wanted
- 18 Q. You have provided and exhibited a spreadsheet in your 19 statement at LG/26 — we don't need to look at it. it's 20 $\{RBK00001858\}$ — and that shows the arrangements with 21 hotels which were in place as of 18 June, and it shows 22 that of the 15 hotels named, only four provided 2.3 breakfast, lunch and dinner, and five provided breakfast 2.4 and dinner. So there was a reasonable proportion which 25 were limited in what they could provide.

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1 Again, you accept that; that was the best you could 2 do in terms of the hotels that were available?

- A. Yes, better to get a room in a hotel than not to get a room, and if they provided full board, that was great, but if they didn't, then it was just best to get a room.
- 6 Q. So in relation to those which are not full board, you 7 mentioned that there was a need and a recognition for 8 financial support to allow those who were in those 9 hotels to be able to purchase food for themselves? 10
 - A. Yes. I'm very aware -- and I've worked in the field of social housing for a very long time. I've always done this job because I've wanted to help people to provide good quality accommodation on low incomes, and I'm very aware of how people live from -- you know, live on very low incomes and it's very difficult to manage your budget, and I know that people will have left Grenfell and they won't have had any money in their own bank accounts, and will have lived from pay cheque to pay cheque, or from kind of benefit to benefit, and people do eke out their meals on the basis that they have bought enough to last the week, and there is no way that they can afford something different to that, and that's just in the normal course of events. So if you have something like this, where you have a disaster, and where people can no longer access their own food and no

longer -- and don't have any money and can't go to work, then it's important that we provided them with a financial resource so that they could, you know, provide food for themselves.

Obviously it's very difficult in hotels because they don't, as a rule, have cooking facilities, so, you know, kind of the longer that goes on, the more difficult it becomes for people staying there in order to be able to eat the food that they want without having to rely on restaurants or takeaway services, which nobody wants to do in the longer term.

Well, I'm going to focus, if I may, just on the short term and the immediate aftermath. We've heard about the longer-term difficulties and experiences of those who were bereaved, survivors and residents in evidence earlier on in this module

So in relation to financial assistance, you mention at paragraph 84 of your statement {RBK00035592/23}, which I'll summarise again, but I'll read to you a few

"We arranged money for those households to buy meals which were not provided ... There was a policy established on what food people could have in hotels and what they would get money for. There was a generous food allowance per household."

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1 So in relation to this policy which you refer to at 2. paragraph 84 of your statement, do you recall when that 3 policy was put in place?

- A. No, it would have been -- it was very quickly put in 5 place, but I can't remember whether it was on the 14th or 15th. It was a discussion that took place with 6 7 Gold Group, or it may have taken place with finance 8 colleagues, about how we were to distribute cash and how 9 we were to give people money so that they could make 10
- 11 So we've explored the different types of hotels and that 12 some had less facilities in terms of food available, and 13 you've recognised the need for financial support and you've mentioned the arrangements which we'll explore in 14 15 a little more detail. But do you accept that in the 16 first seven days, which we're exploring, numerous 17 residents were still left without sufficient food or 18 funds in those hotels?

provision for themselves.

- 19 A. If the hotel didn't have full board and the residents 2.0 didn't know about the financial provisions being made, 21 then ves. they would have found that difficult.
- 2.2 Another theme which emerges from the evidence we've 23 heard from those who were in those hotels and 2.4 experienced matters in the first seven days is that many 25 were unaware of what was available to them at the

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1 2 Do you consider that there was an issue regarding 3 communicating what was available to them at the hotels? 4 A. Yes, I mean, I suppose I would have expected people in 5 the hotels to ask the hotels what was available to them and be given that advice and information. Bearing in 6 7 mind that we placed people into hotels on the 14th and 15th very quickly, we probably didn't have the 8 9 information -- a full suite of information available to 10 us to give, you know, people that breakdown. 11 But I completely accept the fact there was a failure 12 of communication for us to follow that up with people 13 placed in hotels --14 15 A. -- about exactly what was available and exactly what 16 they could have. 17 Q. Okav 18 Let's look at {RBK00009799/2}, please. It's 19 an email at 18.08 on 17 June. We may need to scroll 2.0 down a little bit. So it's at the bottom of that page. 21 So we see Fergus Coleman, 17 June, 18.08, and he is 22 of HOS -- is that housing office staff? What would HOS 2.3 stand for? 2.4 A. Yes, something along those lines. 25 Q. I believe he's head of affordable and private sector

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housing, WCC, so he's Westminster City Council.

A. So it's likely to stand for housing options service.

Q. Okay. In housing, Westminster, we've got the date,

we've got the time, 17 June, which is the Saturday, and it's an update provided by him, and I want to draw out a few things from the latest update at 17.45.

This update is derived from assessments which are being undertaken, and those must be assessments for accommodation: is that correct? Temporary

10 accommodation.

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11 A. I don't know because I wasn't copied in to this email.

Q. No, but I'm going to ask you to use your expertise from being 20 years in this field to help me in the environment, that there were HOS staff undertaking assessments, and is it likely that these assessments were in relation to temporary accommodation?

17 A. Yes, I can only presume that, because this is the first time I've seen it.

The last bullet point:

"HOS officers have reported that the experience of doing the assessments has been very distressing."

If we can turn overleaf $\{RBK00009799/3\}$, please, top bullet point:

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"Feedback from officers returning from assessments is that many of the residents are very distressed. Some have had no food or water and have no funds, others have been told that their hotel booking expires after today and they have not confirmation that they can stay after tomorrow."

In bold:

"• From the feedback I am receiving I would strongly recommend that there needs to be welfare support officers on site at the various hotels to offer guidance and reassurance and to deal with immediate welfare needs not just housing needs.

"• Due to the addressed nature of some of the resident[s] the quality of information being gathered to assess housing need is lacking."

So you weren't copied in on that document there, but to give you the opportunity to familiarise yourself, and as we perhaps thought at the beginning, likely that housing assessments are being undertaken, and this is the feedback from those officers undertaking those housing assessments; correct?

22 A. Yes

Q. Was this something that you were aware of on 17 June,
 these concerns being expressed in relation to Grenfell
 residents when housing assessments were taking place?

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1 A. No.

Q. I want us to turn to another email, please, {RBK00002735}, which we've touched upon earlier, from recollection. This is an email we dealt with lower down in the thread, and if we look at the centre, where it says Andrew Carter, Saturday, 17 June, 7.59 pm, so just before 8 pm, you are copied in to this email, and we dealt with the thread earlier on, but this is the next matter which was mentioned in the thread:

"Many thanks.

"Mr Hasina also reported that he hasn't eaten in 3 days. There has been suggestions from a few people that breakfast is available at the hotels but no other meals. Just a suggestion but is it worth contacting the hotels to confirm if other meals are available and will be covered?"

Then Amanda Gill, further up in the thread, asks for a contact number to speak to the sender of that email, Andrew Carter.

Again, were you aware of these matters? This is on 18 June.

22 A. The 17th -- this is from Saturday, 17th June.

Q. Yes, correct, Saturday, 17 June, and the response from
 Amanda Gill is on the Sunday morning at 10.11.

25~ A. On Saturday I was in -- either in Westminster meeting

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3 officers to go out and undertake those welfare checks. 4 I was copied in to this email on Saturday evening, so it 5 is very likely that I saw it, but I was still at Westminster till quite late, so I'm not sure whether 6 7 I read it on Saturday evening, and on Sunday morning I very likely saw it, but I don't remember, to be honest 8 9 with you, and I would have taken from the fact that 10 Amanda saw that email that she was going to call Andrew 11 and to address that issue. 12 Q. Just drawing this together, we've seen specific emails 13 from colleagues from the tri-borough -- one from LBHF, 14 one from Westminster City Council -- independently 15 arriving at concerns regarding food, welfare, 16 communication, with those who were placed in those 17 hotels between four and six days after events on 18

with Barbara Brownlee, who was my equivalent in

Westminster, who had also been asked to mobilise housing

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Would you accept that this is a stark illustration that something had gone significantly wrong in the care that should have been provided to those in emergency accommodation?

A. I would say in certain instances there was definitely
 clearly a case that something had gone awfully wrong,
 that those people hadn't been provided with the food

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and/or — that they so desperately needed, and I'm, to be honest with you, horrified to read now that people were left in that situation, because I just didn't imagine for a moment that that was actually taking place. I thought we'd been very clear with the hotels about what people could and couldn't have, which we booked in, and expected that to be able to be communicated to the people that we had placed there.

I completely accept there was a lack of communication by RBKC to the people placed in hotels, but it was very difficult circumstances, and undoubtedly I can only say we should have done better.

- Q. You mention that you're horrified, you mention certain instances where this occurred. Can I suggest that this was a pattern, not an isolated case where it went horribly wrong; isn't that correct?
- 17 A. I can't concur that from these emails that you have in 18 front of me.
- 19 Q. I've given you the opportunity to respond.

I'm going to move on now to the provision of financial support.

You've mentioned in your evidence that RBKC staff were providing financial assistance from the outset, and perhaps we could read paragraph 86 of your witness statement, which is at {RBK00035592/23}. If we could

read paragraph 86, this is what it says:

"On 14 June, Housing officers started to give people money early in the day. Housing were their main point of contact, so it made sense for Housing officers to take care of this from the beginning. My team were given cash ... We were very aware that people would have no money on their person or limited access to funds. We put in place a policy that each household was to receive £500 for emergency funds in cash ... Then from the 15 June at Westway, there was the facility to hand out more cash. I do not know the full details of the policy from the 15th onwards."

case, that there was an initial policy of £500, and then you're not really sure what happened from 15 June?

A. So there was an initial —— in terms of what happened on the 14th, I believe the team went up with enough cash to give people who were presenting to us a small sum of money, £50, so that they had something, and then it was discussed, and I believe it's mentioned in the minutes of the meeting, that they were to make available £1,500 —— £500 for emergency funds, cash being the easiest way to do that for people who may not have a bank account, may not have any of their cards or have

Can you help us in relation to that, was that the

any documentation to be able to access any of those $143 \label{eq:43}$

facilities that they may have. So people presenting at the Westway or coming to the Westway were able to be given that sum of money, and people were able to hand —— and finance were arranging for that amount of money to be delivered to the Westway, and then people to be able to be given that money.

But, to be honest with you, I don't really know what happened after that. It was just: how can we make sure that people have some money in order to be able to buy the essentials for the first couple of days, and then afterwards it's not a housing department issue, it's a wider corporate issue of how we provide to help people in those early days.

14 Q. If we could look at {RBK00047576}, please. This is
15 an email sent on 15 June at 18.26, we can see at the
16 top, it's forwarded by Amanda Johnson to herself. So we
17 can focus down on the email just below that from
18 Daniel Smith, and that's at 18.26, and you are in the
19 body of recipients, Laura Johnson. So on the evening of
20 15 June:

"We have arranged for an out of hours service for any urgently required cash collections that cannot wait until tomorrow.

" ...

"The cashiers have already prepared batches of £500 $\,$

1 ready for collection." just finished work for the day and I explained to her 2 It talks about authorisation forms and, in essence, 2 that we had ran out of money on the card and that 3 it appears to be that the money would be available from 3 I could not feed my kids. She said that if I needed 4 16 June at the Westway: is that --4 money, she could give me some out of her own pocket. A. That would appear to be the case, yes. 5 5 But I told her that I wanted what I was entitled to. Q. Okay. I didn't want to take her own money from her, that 6 6 7 There's a reference in the email we just looked at 7 wasn't right." 8 which talks about a list of flat numbers, right in the 8 The implication was that he wasn't able to get any 9 middle there, when we are just talking about batches of 9 financial assistance formally from the council at that 10 10 £500. It talks about a list of flat numbers. Flat stage. 11 numbers, one would assume, relating to Grenfell Tower; 11 I want to give you another example, please, and this 12 12 is that correct? is an example not from a bereaved, survivor or resident. 13 13 but an example from one of your colleagues, Q. Can you help with this issue: was financial assistance 14 14 subordinates, in fact, Veneeze Augustine. She has 15 initially limited to those living in Grenfell Tower and 15 provided a statement to the Inquiry, and at the time of 16 16 not including walkway residents? the fire, Ms Augustine was a homeless team manager, 17 17 A. I don't remember, to be honest. which we have referred to before when we were referring 18 Q. If we could turn to {RBK00027735}, please, a document 18 to one of the plans at the outset of this questioning. 19 that we've seen already. This is the Grenfell residents 19 Perhaps we could open up her statement, please, at $\{RBK00035411/6\}, \ please, \ paragraph 30. \ So this is on$ 20 action plan from your meeting on 15 June 2017, 2.0 2.1 an internal document which you refer to in your 21 15 June, we can see from surrounding evidence, and she statement at paragraph 51 {RBK00035592/13}. 22 22 says this. These are during the checks: 'Whilst at the Holiday Inn I visited a 87 year old 2.3 23 I wonder if we could scroll down, please, to page 2 2.4 {RBK00027735/2}, and we will see "Finance", and it says 2.4 lady from the walkways who was distressed as she did not 2.5 have her purse with her and therefore had no access to 145 147 " $\bullet\hspace{0.1cm}$ Households to be given cash to cover living 1 1 money and could not buy food. The Holiday Inn only 2 2 provided breakfast for those staying there and therefore 3 " • Finance currently with Corporate Finance to 3 it would be necessary for them to purchase food. I went arrange for cash to be made available. to a cash point and withdrew some money from my own 5 " • Potential allocation of £1k per household." 5 personal account to give to her - I cannot remember how So drawing it together, there's fragments of 6 much I gave. One of the social workers then spent some 6 7 7 information, trying to assist you when the policy was time speaking with her. By the end of the visit the 8 8 lady seemed to be calmer and some of her concerns had devised and implemented. 9 9 been allayed. I also contacted social services to It appears probably implementation more likely on 10 16 June: is that fair? 10 inform them about this lady." 11 A. It does appear to be the case, yeah. 11 Was this something that one of your housing team 12 Q. And in terms of criteria, was there a criteria for 12 members raised with you, that there was an elderly 13 13 allocating money? walkway resident without financial support in a hotel on 14 A. I don't remember, to be honest with you. I'd have to 14 15 June? 15 see evidence of that to jog my memory. 15 A. I don't remember that being raised with me directly. It 16 Q. Okay. 16 may well have been, but I don't remember. 17 In relation to the inclusion or exclusion of those 17 Q. Would you acknowledge and agree that would be a matter 18 who were walkway residents in those first few days, 18 of real concern? 19 14th and 15th, I'm just going to read a couple of 19 A. Yes 2.0 2.0 examples and see if this assists your recollection as to Q. Can you assist with what the process was, if any, in 21 21 communicating that financial assistance was available to whether that body of residents was excluded.

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"We bumped into a Council worker, a lady who had

Hicham Cherbika, in his statement, {IWS0001305/9},

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paragraphs 76 to 78, says this. He is a walkway

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No, the financial assistance was being developed, and

I cannot remember what the process was for letting

people know that there was financial assistance

those affected on 14, 15, 16 and 17 June?

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1 available to them. As I said, it was a very fast-moving 2 situation, and people were being assigned social workers 3 and welfare workers, and I can only presume now as 4 a matter of hindsight that that information was relayed 5 through that means. But there wasn't a written 6 communication nor a social media communication sent out 7 by the housing department to inform them of what 8 financial assistance that there may be available to 9 10

Q. So in terms of presumptions and assumptions, you mentioned it being a fluid situation; it would only be if somebody had spoken to a housing officer who visited them on 15 June or word of mouth, quite frankly, that's the only way they would have found out; is that right?

A. Yes, I was not in charge of sending out information about the financial assistance that we were giving. What I was advising of was the financial assistance we gave people on the 14th as an immediate cash sum, and then talking to the finance department about what people needed as an emergency amount of money to tide them over until more formal arrangements could be made.

But, no, I was not responsible for communicating nor did I communicate or instruct anyone to communicate from RBKC exactly what the financial arrangements that were being developed were to the people who were staying in

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1 the hotels.

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Q. It flows from what you have just said that there's probably agreement with the next question, but RBKC, in their opening submissions again to this module, state that the council failed to provide the public with clear, consistent communications after the fire as a result, individual residents missed out on receiving support to which they were entitled.

In relation to that, do you accept that this was a fundamental failing in relation to the council?

11 A. Yes, I accept the council's opening statement and theway it has been phrased.

Q. I want to deal with a discrete but important issue, which is residents which were discharged from hospitals. A number of residents were in hospital, and then, in the passing days, some of those were discharged with nowhere to go.

I want to turn to an email, $\{RBK00001026\}$, please. It's an email dated 14 June, at the outset, at 07.41.

We've touched upon this already, and I just wanted to revisit the third part of that email that you sent at 7.41 to your colleagues:

"We are also setting up a protocol for those people in hospital who will be discharged and need to be rehoused."

1 Correct?

2 A. Yes, that's what I said.

Q. And there was a recognition at that stage that there
 needs to be some system in place to ensure that those
 vulnerable individuals by the very nature that they were
 in hospital don't get missed; is that correct?

A. That's correct, yes.

8 Q. Can you assist with what the protocol was for people9 being discharged from hospital?

10 A. No, I think that statement was drawn from -- I was 11 obviously sitting in the BECC at that point, and had 12 probably had a conversation with my colleagues in adult 13 social care about where the responsibility lay for what 14 we did. I'm not aware that the housing department ever 15 actually set up a protocol for what happened for people 16 who were being discharged from hospital. From 17 recollection. I believe adult social care took that on 18 board as something that they then -- they would then 19 liaise with the hospitals about, and about -- all 2.0 hospitals have social workers, and it would be for them 21 to liaise with the social workers in the hospitals about

what we did when people were discharged.

But we ourselves, I nor my team I don't believe set up a -- drafted a protocol for people being discharged from hospital.

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Q. Let's look at paragraph 37 of your statement, please,
 {RBK00035592/9}, just to draw out what you've said. You
 say:

"The protocol for people being discharged from hospital was organised through Adult Social Care ... and Families' and [Children's] Services ..."

Which you've just said a few moments ago.

"They had social workers at hospitals to liaise with the hospital and families on what housing and/or support they needed when they were due to be discharged. ASC [adult social care] would then make this information available to Housing. We would then arrange For them to be placed in hotels."

So, in short, the protocol was that ASC would do that first contact, and they would inform you that there was somebody who was being discharged, and then that you would arrange a placement in hotels?

 $\begin{array}{lll} 18 & \hbox{A. That was my belief, that that was the situation that was} \\ 19 & \hbox{going to take place}. \end{array}$

20 Q. Did that work? Is that what happened?

21 A. I can't remember, to be honest with you.

22 Q. Let's try and help your memory.

1'm going to give you a suggestion so that you can have that in mind when we're working through the documentation. I'm going to suggest that there was some

confusion and a lack of communication between your department and ASC regarding the procedures for providing housing for those discharged. So I don't expect an answer now, I'm going to try and assist your recollection by looking at some documentation.

Let's look at {RBK00006745}. This is an email of

Let's look at {RBK00006745}. This is an email on 16 June at 19.57, Amanda Johnson. You were not copied in:

"Dear BECC

"It would be good if we know about any people being potentially discharged from hospital in the short term — especially as we enter the weekend."

So your senior colleague being proactive, ascertaining if anybody was going to be discharged; correct?

16 A. Yes.

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Q. If we could turn to {RBK00011588}, please, at the bottom
of page 1, this is an email the Inquiry's seen I think
already, Michelle Scaife, 17 June, 14.23, so this is the
Saturday, the weekend:

"My understanding from a brief discussion with Amanda Johnson (housing) this morning is that anyone who will require accommodation at time of discharge needs to be flagged with them as soon as possible. Any information pertaining to family members that will need

housing with person for discharge will also be of benefit to housing. Apparently hospital teams are [directing] this information to housing or via RBKC ASC Community Liaisons ...

"I think it would be helpful for us to all have one directive on this because at the moment there are a number of lists flying around and assumptions about who is doing what — Are hospital sending information direct to housing or is all information coming to us here at ASC and we pass it on to housing? Rob/Paul [Hargreaves, as we can see in the list of recipients] are you able to clarify what the message is that housing has given hospitals in terms of this or how hospital teams are currently working in term[s] of this matter?"

Two different departments within RBKC, not seeking to attribute blame to any particular department here, but was it the case that information was falling, perhaps, between the two stools, between housing and between ASC, and some residents were discharged from hospital without RBKC knowing?

A. That may well have been the case. It was my understanding that adult social care were dealing with it . I probably had a discussion with Amanda, and we had followed this up, but it sounds from this email that there wasn't clarity on who was dealing with the

discharge of people leaving hospital, and what we were seeking to do was to find -- to have clarity on that.

3 Q. Yes.

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4 A. We were probably concerned that people might be
5 discharged over the weekend period and that would be,
6 you know, more difficult for us to deal with because
7 there wouldn't be such a number of staff available.

Q. As a general observation, Sue Redmond, who gave evidence yesterday, she was at London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and she held a pivotal role as the HALO, the humanitarian assistance lead officer, in those early days, she referred in her evidence to the Inquiry yesterday that there was confusion at times in these sorts of situations, and this was a product of different parts of the council operating as silos.

In relation to that phrase, "operating in silos", was there an issue with different departments during this response operating in silos?

A. I think all departments within the council were trying to do their very best in very difficult circumstances, and information was shared at the Gold meetings that were happening twice a day about what people were managing with and what help they needed. So, yes, people were operating on their own initiative, doing their own thing, but there was an opportunity twice

a day to come together and talk about those problems, and/or we were all available to each other, in that I knew Sue Redmond, I was sitting next to the tri—borough director of family and children's services during this time, and so there was an opportunity outside of the meetings to talk to me about any areas that there was fears, where there may not have been enough communication on.

I was sitting in an open—plan office, with —— on the same floor as adult social care and children's services, so although people were all doing their own thing, there was plenty of opportunity to come and talk to me or me to talk to my colleagues about issues that needed to be resolved.

15 Q. I'm going to move on to another topic.

We know that on 16 June, the London Local Authority Gold resolution was activated. During the evening of 16 June, you have mentioned at paragraph 77 of your statement {RBK00035592/20} that Nicholas Holgate asked you, together with your colleagues Amanda Gill and Rachael Dalton, to go to the Westminster BECC to meet with Barbara Brownlee. Barbara Brownlee was the director of housing at Westminster; is that correct?

24 A. Yes.

 $25\,$ $\,$ Q. What did you understand to be the purpose of that

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1 meeting?

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2 A. I understood -- we had had a meeting earlier in the day 3 which had been truncated because there had been 4 an invasion of the Town Hall. We were evacuated from the Town Hall, and, as I say in my statement, it was 5 6 a terrifying experience.

> At that meeting we were asked to go and meet Barbara Brownlee of the view that Westminster were to make the housing team available and offer assistance to RBKC, which I was more than happy to accept. The more people the better.

Q. Scroll down to paragraph 80 {RBK00035592/21}, please. 12 13 Thank you. We're on 18 June, and it says at this stage, 14

> "I was informed at some point late morning or early afternoon by Nicolas Holgate that I was no longer leading the Housing effort and that [Barbara] Brownlee would be leading my team."

Is that correct?

20 A. Yes.

- 21 Q. So that would be the Sunday, as you mentioned, you no 2.2 longer were leading housing efforts.
- 2.3 A. Yes. I believe the decision had been taken before that, 2.4 but I wasn't informed until Sunday.
- 25 Q. Just going back to that meeting on 16 June, that evening

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- 1 when you went to the BECC at Westminster to meet
- Barbara Brownlee for the first time, according to 2
- 3 Amanda Gill, your colleague, at that meeting with
- Barbara Brownlee, RBKC were criticised for the response;
 - is that correct? Do you recall that?

better, to be honest with you.

- A. I'm sure if Amanda recalls that -- I don't recall it particularly , but, yes, there was probably a general view that we were not doing as well as we could.
- 9 Q. Specifically , paragraph 51 {RBK00044877/9}, it was 10 replayed back to you and the other attendees that it was 11 not appropriate to leave residents in hotels over the 12 weekend, and that WCC, Westminster City Council, would 13 be completing suitability assessments on Saturday 14
- morning. Does that assist your recollection? 15 A. Yes, I mean, we went to Westminster on Saturday morning 16 to meet Barbara and a group of officers at a housing 17 office somewhere in Westminster, Lisson Grove, somewhere 18 massively inconvenient, I have to say, and officers were 19 going to be deployed to do assessments of people in 2.0 their hotels. The more people who could help the

The assessments, as I understood it at that point, were really as a push from central government in order to be able to rehouse everybody within three weeks, so that was the driver behind it. Not necessarily welfare

checks, but because central government had been

convinced that it was possible to rehouse all of the

3 people who were coming out of Grenfell Tower as

4 survivors into accommodation within a three—week period. Q. Perhaps for context and to assist everybody, there was

- an announcement, is it right, on the late afternoon of 6 7 16 June by the Prime Minister in relation to housing
- 8 placements; is that correct?
 - A. I believe there was, yes.
- 10 Q. You mentioned that there was a guarantee that people 11 would be rehoused in three weeks; is that correct?
- 12 Α I believe so, ves.
- 13 Q. In relation to that matter, where I've asked you
- 14 a number of questions today about emergency
- 15 accommodation -- and this is a different type of
- 16 accommodation, and it's outside the scope of this
- 17 module — but in relation to this point, did that
- 18 announcement have an impact on the ability of your
- 19 department to operate?
- 20 A. Yes
- 2.1 Q. And can you assist us what that impact was?
- 2.2 A. Because the government had made a decision that --
- 23 initially it was going to be two weeks, and then they
- 2.4 extended it to three weeks -- all people were going to
- 2.5 be made rehousing in three weeks, there became -- all of

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1 the efforts $\,--\,$ well, large parts of the efforts of

2 the -- of my team were then to be directed towards

3 assessing the needs of the people in hotels and the

offers that we had received from other housing

5 associations and other councils in order to place those

6 families in that accommodation, and it was, if I may

7 say, an enormous waste of everybody's time.

8 I categorically stated, both on the Friday to the 9 housing minister, when he came to see me, and anybody

10 who would listen to me, that there was no way that we 11 were going to rehouse everybody that needed rehousing

12 within three weeks, because it was not the right

13 approach to take to people who were traumatised and had

14 come out of the most awful situation. What they needed

15 was a considered and thoughtful response about what we

16 would offer them and where they would like to live.

17 People were in absolutely no fit state to make decisions

18 about where they wanted to live and what they wanted.

19 What they needed was a compassioned and considered 2.0 response. What they didn't need was a target from

21 central government that wasn't achievable.

22 Q. Okay.

23 I'm going to move on, if I may, to another document, 2.4 {RBK00049580}, please. This is an email between your 2.5

housing team members, Rob Shaw, Claire Wise, on 17 June

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at 7.03. So this would be the morning after the meeting with Barbara Brownlee.

Could I just help you with some of the context, if that's okay, and read out that email, please. So it says this:

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"Amanda, Laura and Rachael attended a [Government] Gold meeting last night. We've been told Westminster are taking over from us, because we have been deemed ineffectual. Yep. Extremely valid criticism of the RBKC central command however, raised at this meeting too. Don't say anything yet. Amanda, Laura and Rachael have to head to Westminster this lunchtime so waiting for the official line."

Claire Wise responds later on in the thread. At the top of that thread:

"It is valid in some respects but it is shameful that we haven't been supported by London or national services. How are local authorities expected to have this expertise? There needs to be a centralised control team to be deployed to major incidents to guide local authorities to it. Fire brigades have it. Every single person tried their absolute best. Housing and planning staff should not be coordinating this. It needs major expertise. Frustrating and upsetting."

I just want to explore a couple of matters which are

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opinions expressed by your colleagues.

Do you agree with the opinion that the criticisms made in relation to RBKC central command at the meeting you were at were valid?

A. Yes, in some respects, that it was an incredibly difficult situation. It was a national disaster, which perhaps when you're in the middle of it you don't really appreciate how big it is, because you are in it, trying to deal with it and manage the results from it. But, of course, other people are standing on the outside of it and making very different judgements. So whereas I can quite understand why people found us to be ineffectual, all we thought was that we had tried our very hardest, and we had booked hundreds of hotel rooms and placed people in lots of accommodation, and we were definitely thinking about what the next step was. So it felt quite harsh, but I can understand how people drew that conclusion.

But it was -- if I may say, it was a national disaster. It wasn't an RBKC disaster, it was a national disaster, and when you're in the middle of that, it was utterly shocking to see how people stepped back from RBKC. London Gold was enacted, which was great, but it is a very difficult situation when the national government are briefing against you, and you just don't

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know where to turn.

Q. You described it as a national disaster, and I want to deal with the final topic, which is your assessment of the adequacy of the response by RBKC.

Perhaps we could turn to paragraph 89 of your witness statement {RBK00035592/24}, please. Under the heading "Adequacy of the Response":

"The emergency planning response by RBKC should have been better. It did not adequately meet the needs of either the families whose lives were devastated by the fire or the local community who were also horribly affected by the events of the 14th of June."

In relation to that, do you stand by those comments?

14 A. Yes, I do

Q. "However, I think it should be acknowledged that this was an unprecedented event and I believe any borough faced with managing a response to a fire of this magnitude and loss of life of this scale would have struggled to provide the level of help and assistance required."

21 Again, is that your view?

22 A. Yes, it is

23 Q. If we could go to paragraph 93 {RBK00035592/25}, please, to put your assessment in complete context:

25 "The people so terribly [a] ffected by the events of

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the 14th June were let down by central government. They did not appear to have any emergency planning function to put into place in the event of a disaster such as this."

Again, is there anything you want to say in relation to that comment about the involvement of central government?

8 A. No, I think I've set it out very clearly. They didn't
9 appear to have any emergency planning that they could
10 contribute towards the council with. I understood
11 afterwards about London Gold. But at the time, central
12 government's response seemed to be one of asking for
13 figures about how many placements we had made, not
14 offering help or assistance.

15 Q. I want to revisit a final matter which you mentioned and I asked you about earlier on in the narrative, which is at page 6 of your statement {RBK00035592/6}, that's paragraph 24. It's a view you say that you arrived at after events and not at the time:

"RBKC was not sufficiently prepared to deal with a fire that was so devastating and of such a significant impact."

Why did you form that opinion?

A. I would say that was fairly self—evident. I don't think
 that, as I've said at the end of my statement, any local

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2 which was a national disaster and needed to be dealt 3 with on a regional or national basis. It was caught in 4 the eye of a terrible, terrible storm, and it took some 5 time to appraise and assess what had happened, and that's very hard to do once you're dealing with events 6 and just trying to cope with an unprecedented level of 8 both media interest and a highly traumatised community 9 which had just witnessed something that nobody should 10 ever have to see. 11 So, no. I don't think RBKC was sufficiently prepared 12 to deal with a fire of this scale and this disaster. 13 I don't think any local authority would have been able 14 to deal with it. That's not to say that it couldn't 15 have been dealt with better at the time by a local 16 authority like RBKC, but we just weren't in a position 17 to manage the scale of the disaster as it unfolded. 18 MR KEATING: Ms Johnson, they're all the questions I have at 19 this stage for you. 20 Mr Chairman, there have been a number of suggested 2.1 questions which have flowed through. 2.2 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: It would be probably sensible, 2.3 wouldn't it, to take the afternoon break at this point 2.4 anvwav? 25 MR KEATING: Yes.

authority was really equipped to prepare with something

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1 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Ms Johnson, as you know, we have to 2 have a break at this point so that counsel can check 3 that nothing has been overlooked, and so that others can suggest questions that perhaps we ought to put to you, 5 so we'll break now until 3.20, and then we'll come back 6 and see if there are any more questions that we need to 7 ask vou. THE WITNESS: Okay, thank you. 8 9 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: I think, as before, please don't 10 talk to anyone about your evidence while you're away. 11 All right? Thank you very much. 12 (Pause) I think that ought to give you long enough. 13 MR KEATING: Yes, thank you. 14 15 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: If you need more time, just let us 16 MR KEATING: I will do. Thank you. 17 18 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. 19 (3.06 pm) 2.0 (A short break) 2.1 (3.20 pm) 2.2 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right, Ms Johnson. Well, we'll see 23 if there are any more questions. 2.4 Yes. Mr Keating. MR KEATING: Just one follow-up question, Ms Johnson, if

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very aware that there was going to be a very limited number of available housing units to be able to offer

people who were coming -- who needed rehousing after

I may, in relation to when you were talking about the

A. Yes, or to be placed —— follow—on housing, perhaps.

 $\mathsf{Q}. \;\; \mathsf{So} \; \mathsf{in} \;\; \mathsf{relation} \;\; \mathsf{to} \;\; \mathsf{follow-on} \;\; \mathsf{housing}, \; \mathsf{and} \;\; \mathsf{you} \;\; \mathsf{mentioned}$

inappropriate in terms of a period of time; is that

Q. So we have displaced residents placed in emergency accommodation, ie hotels, in those early days; we've got

this three—week announcement in relation to placing those affected in follow—on housing, which you thought

consider what the correct interim approach would be?

really aware of how few social housing units there are

in RBKC which are available in any one year. I'm even more aware that there's 50,000 people in temporary

five years ago -- and there is a huge problem with

homelessness and a lack of social housing. So I was

accommodation in London — maybe more now, that was

A. I -- so, as I explained earlier in my evidence, I'm

was wholly unrealistic; what did you consider or did you

Q. Follow-on housing. I want to be precise as to the

in evidence that you thought that was wholly

 ${\sf phrase} \ -- \ {\sf permanent} \ {\sf housing?}$

terminology.

correct?

A. Yes.

three—week announcement in relation to -- was it your

I was very aware as well that people didn't just need to be popped in the first flat that became available. That wasn't the right approach. There was a lot of offers coming in from housing associations and other local authorities, but whether that would be something that the people who needed rehousing wanted was an entirely different matter, and quite rightly They should be given time and space in order to be able to make decisions, and I just didn't and couldn't see how people who had been through such an awful traumatic experience could possibly be asked to make a decision about where they wanted to live or what type of housing they wanted to live in, in such -- in a period straight after the fire . And I knew that the type of accommodation that we'd been offered, other social housing units across London, probably wouldn't be what people wanted.

So I didn't have an alternative to where to go from hotels and what happened before people were permanently housed, but I did rather suspect that people wouldn't want to be just bunged in a tower block in Wandsworth

on, Ms Johnson, if 25 want to be just bunged in a to

and told, "You'll be all right there for a couple of years until we find you something permanent". What people really probably wanted was something entirely different, which is quite a personalised service, where people considered what their wants and needs were, and quite rightly, you know, kind of some thought and consideration about where they wanted to go next. And that may well mean that people stayed in hotels for a longer period than anybody ever envisaged at the outset, but moving people and then moving people again and then moving people again is just awful. It's awful when you haven't been through a disaster, but even more awful when you have.

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But I also knew it's a very difficult problem to solve, because there just aren't enough social housing units in London and the south east, so supply was always going to be difficult in the wake of overwhelming demand, not just from the wider housing waiting lists of all boroughs, but also from people who needed to be rehoused, who needed a thoughtful and considered approach. And I said on the Friday that I thought it would probably take around two years to rehouse everybody, and I think it probably took about that length of time.

25 Q. Finally, Ms Johnson, in relation to events between

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14 June and those days when you were involved up until

2 17 June, is there anything now that you would have done 3 differently? A. Gosh, yes. If -- I would have made it a priority to 5 communicate, communicate, communicate with all of the people who had been placed in hotels. I didn't realise 6 7 at the time that people had such a lack of information. 8 I suppose I was dealing with events as they arose, as 9 was my team, in terms of placing people, cordons, a huge 10 amount of my time was spent answering press enquiries 11 asking for information. But actually, now being able to 12 step back from it and looking at it with hindsight, 13 actually what people really needed when they came out of 14 there was they needed people to come round and see them 15 straight away and be able to talk to them and just run 16 them through what was happening, and really explain, 17 you know, kind of how we were managing that situation. 18 We just didn't have the manpower, and we probably didn't

So that's what I would - that's my reflection on that, is that people really needed a great deal more communication and understanding and information from the local authority than was available, and that's what I would definitely do different.

think it through in careful enough detail about what

people really needed after they'd come out of that.

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1 MR KEATING: Ms Johnson, it only remains for me on behalf of 2 the counsel team to thank you again for attending today, 3 and we've got no further questions. Thank you. 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Ms Johnson, it's right, of course, 5 that I should thank you for coming a second time to give evidence to the Inquiry, albeit on a completely 6 7 different area of our investigations. We are, 8 of course, very grateful to you for making the time to 9 come and give your evidence. It's been helpful and very 10 interesting to hear what you have to tell us, and so, as 11 I say, we are very grateful to you. 12 Thank you very much, and you're now free to go, of 13 14 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much, Chair. 15 (The witness withdrew) SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much, Mr Keating. 16 17 Now, we have another witness coming, but not until 18 tomorrow; is that correct? MR KEATING: That's correct. Mr Millett will be calling 19 20 Mr Holgate, the former town clerk, tomorrow. 2.1 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, very good. Well, thank you 22 very much. 23 So at that point we will close for today and we will 2.4 resume the hearing tomorrow at 10 o'clock in the 2.5 morning.

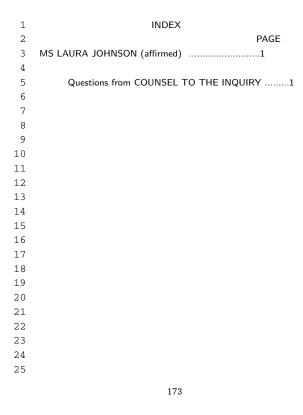
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1 MR KEATING: Thank you. SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. 2. 3 10 o'clock tomorrow, please. (3.30 pm) (The hearing adjourned until 10 am5 6 on Thursday, 5 May 2022) 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 2.0 21 2.2

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