

OPUS2

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY RT

Day 273

May 5, 2022

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Thursday, 5 May 2022

1
2 (10.00 am)
3 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to
4 today’s hearing.
5 Today we’re going to hear from the former town clerk
6 of Kensington and Chelsea, Mr Holgate.
7 Yes, Mr Millett.
8 MR MILLETT: Yes, Mr Chairman, good morning. Good morning,
9 members of the panel.
10 I now call Mr Nicholas Holgate, please.
11 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Thank you.
12 MR NICHOLAS HOLGATE (sworn)
13 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Thank you very much. Please sit
14 down, make yourself comfortable.
15 (Pause)
16 Right.
17 Yes, Mr Millett.
18 MR MILLETT: Yes.
19 Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY
20 MR MILLETT: Mr Holgate, first of all, good morning to you.
21 A. Morning.
22 Q. Can I start by thanking you very much for coming to
23 the Inquiry and assisting us with our investigations .
24 We are very grateful to you.
25 During the course of your evidence, a number of

1

1 things.
2 First, if I ask a question that you can't hear or
3 don't understand or want me to rephrase, I can do that.
4 Second, could I please ask you to keep your voice up
5 so that the person who sits to your immediate right and
6 is typing can get down your evidence clearly. Don't nod
7 or shake your head; you have to say "Yes" or "No", as
8 the case may be.
9 A. Yes.
10 Q. We will take breaks during the course of the morning and
11 the afternoon, but if you need a break at any other
12 time, we can take a break. All right?
13 Now, you've made a number of statements to
14 the Inquiry, two of which relate to the aftermath of the
15 fire. Everything that we're going to be examining
16 together will appear on the screen on your desk in front
17 of you.
18 Can I show you first two statements. You have given
19 us your first aftermath witness statement to the Inquiry
20 at {RBK00035426}. That's dated 27 September at the foot
21 of it, at page 10, if we can go there, please, and there
22 is a signature. Is that your signature?
23 A. It is.
24 Q. Thank you.
25 The second aftermath statement is at {RBK00063176}.

2

1 That's dated 21 January 2021, and if we could go,
2 please, to page 7, you can see a signature there. Yes?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. Can you please confirm that's your signature as well?
5 A. It is.
6 Q. Have you read both of these statements recently?
7 A. I have.
8 Q. And can you confirm, please, that their contents are
9 true?
10 A. I think there is one error in the first statement, which
11 is that recently, I think, while looking at other
12 material, I gathered that there was actually a form in
13 the contingency plan for invoking London Gold, and
14 I think in my first statement I say that, as it were,
15 a conversation is enough. So I think I got that wrong.
16 Q. Right.
17 Now, let's turn to your background and
18 qualifications and look at your first aftermath
19 statement, and let's take this as quickly as we can.
20 Page 2 {RBK00035426/2}, paragraph 6, where you touch
21 briefly on your work experience.
22 Summarising it, is it right that you worked in
23 central government, first employed by HM Treasury in
24 1984 as a management accountant, and you held that role
25 for some 20 years?

3

1 A. I held a number of roles within the civil service for,
2 I think, 24 years, yeah.
3 Q. 24 years, right.
4 And from 2004 to 2008, you held the role of chief
5 operating officer .
6 A. Sorry, I was embracing the two, yeah.
7 Q. Right, fine. But 2004 to 2008, you held the role of
8 chief operating officer at the Department for Culture,
9 Media and Sport, I think, didn't you?
10 A. Correct.
11 Q. Yes. In 2008, you joined RBKC as executive director for
12 finance, information systems and property. That's
13 paragraph 6.
14 A. Yes.
15 Q. Yes. Then in 2013 you became the interim chief
16 executive, alongside your role as finance director; is
17 that right?
18 A. Yes.
19 Q. And then in December 2014 that position became permanent
20 and you became known as the town clerk.
21 A. Yes.
22 Q. Yes. Was that linked together with your role as finance
23 director?
24 A. It was until April 2017.
25 MR MILLETT: Now, at paragraph 5 of your statement, on

4

1 page 1 --
 2 SIR MARTIN MOORE--BICK: I'm sorry, just a moment.
 3 MR MILLETT: There is a noise.
 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE--BICK: I don't know who has got something
 5 broadcasting on.
 6 Anyway, can we all make sure we've got our phones
 7 and anything that might make a noise switched off,
 8 please. Thank you very much.
 9 Yes, on you go, Mr Millett.
 10 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 11 Page 1, paragraph 5, and then over the page on
 12 page 2 {RBK00035426/1-2}, you set out the role that you
 13 occupied as town clerk, and just taking that in summary,
 14 it's right, I think, that you were responsible for the
 15 overall stewardship and good governance of the borough
 16 to ensure the high quality of services; yes?
 17 A. Correct.
 18 Q. And that included the management of senior staff.
 19 A. Correct.
 20 Q. And I think you were responsible to -- that is
 21 answerable to -- the leader of the council, who was at
 22 that stage Nicholas Paget--Brown.
 23 A. That's right.
 24 Q. And also his cabinet; yes?
 25 A. That's right.

5

1 Q. Did you report to him directly?
 2 A. I did.
 3 Q. Right.
 4 In addition to the town clerk role, it's right,
 5 I think, that from December 2014 you also continued to
 6 hold the role of finance director, as you say, until
 7 April 2017. What happened to that role in April 2017?
 8 A. It was awarded to Kevin Bartle, who had been working at
 9 the council for a little while before then.
 10 Q. I see. Did you have a handover with him?
 11 A. Well, he had been performing many of the duties and had
 12 been a finance director at, I think, at least one other
 13 London borough, so he was well appraised of the duties.
 14 Q. Right.
 15 As you tell us later in your statement at
 16 paragraph 51 on page 10 {RBK00035426/10}, you resigned
 17 your role as town clerk on 21 June 2017.
 18 A. Correct.
 19 Q. Yes, so seven days after the fire.
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. Therefore, you would hold -- is this right? -- the sole
 22 position of town clerk -- that is to say town clerk
 23 only -- for some three months.
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Yes.

6

1 Did you find that having the dual role of town clerk
 2 and finance director up until April 2017 adversely
 3 affected your ability in any way to establish yourself
 4 as and to carry out your role as town clerk?
 5 A. I did not think that it did, but of course I could be
 6 wrong about that.
 7 Q. Now, for the purposes of the civil contingencies
 8 framework, to which I wish to turn now, is it right
 9 that, first, a local authority is a category 1
 10 responder?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. And you understood that at the time?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Yes.
 15 In simple terms, did you understand that category 1
 16 responders are those organisations at the core of
 17 emergency service response, which would include the
 18 emergency services, local authorities and NHS bodies?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. And as such, category 1 responders have a number of
 21 legal duties and responsibilities, including maintaining
 22 plans to ensure the ability to perform their functions
 23 in an emergency?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Yes.

7

1 Now, we've heard that the contingency management
 2 plan for RBKC was drafted by and, as it were, owned by
 3 David Kerry, the RBKC contingency planning manager; yes?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. And you understood that the current version at the time
 6 of the Grenfell Tower fire was the one dated
 7 30 April 2015; yes?
 8 A. I wouldn't know off the top of my head which was the
 9 current version.
 10 Q. Right.
 11 A. But they did bear close resemblances to one another.
 12 Q. Right.
 13 Do you agree that that was an important document
 14 which set out how RBKC should respond in the event of
 15 an emergency to which it applied?
 16 A. I do agree.
 17 Q. Yes.
 18 Looking at your own role in an emergency, at
 19 paragraph 8 of your first statement, if we go to page 2
 20 {RBK00035426/2}, let's just pick that up --
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. -- you tell us that, as town clerk, you would be
 23 Borough Gold as part of the council's contingency
 24 management plan; yes?
 25 A. That's correct.

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1 Q. And that's also known as Council Gold.
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. We've seen references to it as Council Gold, and you
 4 understood that expression?
 5 A. Indeed.
 6 Q. Now, if we go to the contingency management plan itself,
 7 we find that at {RBK00028631}. Let's look at the first
 8 page. There it is, 30 April 2015.
 9 Just looking at the first page of this -- and it's
 10 a giant document with lots of bits -- was this
 11 a document with which you were familiar?
 12 A. I was familiar. I had a copy of certainly the main part
 13 of it at home. I re-read it each time a new issue --
 14 I was conscious of a new issue.
 15 Q. You say you had a copy of the main part at home.
 16 A. Yeah.
 17 Q. So was it a hard copy on your --
 18 A. Indeed, a hard copy, and in the office, of course.
 19 Q. Right.
 20 If you go to page 39 in the document
 21 {RBK00028631/39}, please, we can see part 5.2, "Roles
 22 and Responsibilities (summary)", and the functions of
 23 Council Gold are there set out. You can see them in the
 24 first --
 25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Well, certainly in the first box, and there are four
 2 bullet points there:
 3 " ■ Determine the Council's strategic course of
 4 action.
 5 " ■ Lead the Strategic Coordinating Group.
 6 " ■ Liaison with Leader and other Members.
 7 " ■ Attend, or be represented at, multi-agency
 8 Strategic Coordinating Group meetings."
 9 Now, at the time of the fire, did you understand
 10 those to be your responsibilities as Council Gold?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. You did.
 13 Let's then turn to the next topic: training and
 14 capacity.
 15 Is it the position that before the events of
 16 14 June 2017, you had no experience yourself of acting
 17 as Council Gold in a major emergency?
 18 A. That's true.
 19 Q. I think you tell us that at paragraph 14 on page 3
 20 {RBK00035426/3}.
 21 Were you aware at that time that, in relation to
 22 emergency or contingency plans, RBKC, as a category 1
 23 responder, was under a regulatory duty to carry out
 24 training and exercises for the purposes of ensuring that
 25 those plans were effective?

1 A. I'm not sure that I would have known that it was
 2 a regulatory duty, but I would certainly have accepted
 3 that it was very good and recommended practice to do so.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 Dealing with your own training, then, first, as at
 6 June 2017, how would you assess or describe the
 7 sufficiency of training that you had undertaken to act
 8 as Council Gold in the event of an emergency? Was it
 9 sufficient or was it insufficient?
 10 A. Well, I would say it was insufficient, with the benefit
 11 of hindsight, plainly insufficient. I can explain what
 12 I had done, but I think the direct answer to your
 13 question is that it was plainly insufficient.
 14 Q. Now, let's just look at what you had done.
 15 I think in the opening statement put in by RBKC to
 16 this module of this Inquiry, the council says that you
 17 had received some training, but acknowledged that "it
 18 was not of itself sufficient for the role of
 19 Council Gold", and I think you have agreed with that,
 20 but it doesn't represent the totality of the training
 21 that you had received.
 22 Perhaps we can take this more shortly: can you tell
 23 us what training you had received yourself to act as
 24 Council Gold?
 25 A. Certainly. So there is a very modest induction process

1 that my understanding was all London borough chief
 2 executives, or nearly all of them, went through as part
 3 of being on a rota to be London Gold, should there be
 4 a call for a London Gold operation, and that would only
 5 have been a few hours at most. It essentially involved
 6 a visit to a facility which might have hosted
 7 a London-wide operation, were one to be needed and were
 8 there to be a local authority chief executive in a Gold
 9 role.
 10 In addition to that, as you know, we did have
 11 a practice in 2015. I attended as an observer one day
 12 of the Unified Response exercise, which was, I think,
 13 quite an impressive London-wide attempt to rehearse for
 14 a major disaster.
 15 It is just worth recalling that, in terms of large
 16 disasters, I think the one that animated colleagues and
 17 I most over that period was the risk of terrorism. So
 18 I think the Bataclan massacre in Paris had been the
 19 previous year, and the most cohesive thing I had
 20 attended before the fire was a conference on lessons to
 21 be learned from that terrible series of events. Indeed,
 22 if you looked through my mailbox with a fine enough
 23 tooth comb, you would find a couple of things that I was
 24 pursuing coming out of that conference.
 25 Q. Can you remember what those things were?

1 A. I can, but, to be brutally honest, I'd rather not talk
 2 about them, because I don't know whether the council
 3 completed one or both, and one of them would be about
 4 preventing a tragedy, another one would have been about
 5 mitigating it .
 6 Q. In the context of terrorism?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. I see. So are you alluding to a potential national
 9 security issue?
 10 A. Yes, it would have been a national issue if such a thing
 11 had occurred that I was doing work in a very small way
 12 to try and make less likely .
 13 Q. I follow. We may come back to the detail of what you've
 14 just told us in a moment.
 15 A. Sure.
 16 Q. Before we do, let me just examine Mr Kerry's evidence
 17 about training.
 18 We heard from him in his statement that, before
 19 June 2017, the date of the most recent Gold Group
 20 training on strategic command, control and recovery was
 21 14 September 2015, so some 21 months before the fire; is
 22 that right?
 23 A. I think that is right .
 24 Q. That was a two-hour tabletop discussion or desktop
 25 exercise; yes?

13

1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. In relation to the duration of that training, Mr Kerry's
 3 evidence was that it wasn't sufficient; he'd asked for
 4 a four-hour slot -- this is at {Day268/78:2-8} -- and
 5 then he says at first he was told that he couldn't do
 6 it, no need to do it, then he was given two hours, and
 7 then he told us that at the end of the session, as he
 8 left, you told him, "Next time you need longer".
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. Do you recall that?
 11 A. Well, I don't recall it, but it may save time to say
 12 that I cannot off hand think of anything that any of the
 13 RBKC witnesses have said to you over the last few days
 14 with which I would take any issue at all. So if
 15 David Kerry said that, then I said it .
 16 The gloss I would put on it is that I was not sure
 17 what value this sort of exercise would be, but after
 18 two hours, I was persuaded that such training was
 19 worthwhile.
 20 Q. Thank you. That's very helpful.
 21 Just to be clear, in the light of that last answer,
 22 can we be confident that you have followed the RBKC
 23 witnesses' evidence?
 24 A. I've followed anything that has any reference to me in
 25 it .

14

1 Q. Right, okay. I think I understand the parameters of
 2 your answer.
 3 A. Thank you.
 4 Q. Was it the position that senior management were not
 5 prepared to make the time available and commit to
 6 contingency management training, or was there some other
 7 problem?
 8 A. I think that you're right to say that there was
 9 sometimes resistance to setting aside significant time
 10 for such training .
 11 I think it is worth pointing out -- and I'll try to
 12 do this only once, but it's a very important background
 13 fact -- that from 2010 onwards, there were very large
 14 reductions in the recurrent funding of local
 15 authorities. From my other statement, I think the
 16 figure for the borough by the time of 2017 was of the
 17 order of 28%. And despite such a reduction, it was our
 18 very great determination to keep all the normal services
 19 of the borough going as well as possible, if not
 20 actually to improve upon their quality, because that was
 21 the demand -- the rightful demand -- both of residents
 22 and of councillors .
 23 So I was not completely unsympathetic to --
 24 you know, I understood the pressures that senior
 25 managers across the council were under.

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1 Q. To what extent, in light of that answer, was there
 2 consideration given to how to comply with the fixed
 3 statutory obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act
 4 and its regulations and the statutory guidance on the
 5 one hand, whilst allowing for these budget exigencies on
 6 the other?
 7 A. I can't remember an explicit discussion of the tension
 8 between those two things.
 9 Q. Do you remember -- and this is a more general
 10 question -- any discussion at London-wide level within
 11 the LRP or the LRF, or other bodies sitting within the
 12 London or pan-London resilience structure, about whether
 13 some boroughs were doing better than others in relation
 14 to being able to fund their civil contingencies
 15 obligations?
 16 A. I don't recall being party to any such discussion in
 17 those fora. I do not think, in the case of the
 18 Royal Borough, funding was an insurmountable issue; it
 19 was the lack of funding for all the valuable services
 20 that we performed day after day which led to a shortage
 21 of time and great pressure on senior managers that I was
 22 alluding to.
 23 The pan-London body that I did attend fairly
 24 diligently were meetings of the chief executives of most
 25 of the boroughs that took place every five or six weeks,

16

1 I would think. There were occasionally items there, so
 2 for instance the conference on terrorism that I referred
 3 to, or feedback from or plans for the Unified Response
 4 exercise, but, again, I do not recall any discussion in
 5 that forum of the kind that you're mentioning.
 6 Q. Now, let's go back to the contingency management plan,
 7 {RBK00028631/11}, paragraph 1.8, please. You can see
 8 there the heading "Training and exercising" at the top.
 9 Was it the case -- well, let me read it to you. It
 10 says:
 11 "This Contingency Management Plan shall be exercised
 12 at least once annually. The exercise shall test and
 13 validate the activation of the plan, the operation of
 14 the Borough Emergency Control Centres (BECC), the links
 15 between the BECCs and Council services."
 16 Now, with respect to exercising the contingency
 17 management plan, I think you would agree that RBKC
 18 wasn't exercising it annually.
 19 A. I would agree.
 20 Q. And so you would agree not complying with what was set
 21 out in its own plan?
 22 A. I would agree.
 23 Q. Looking at the next passage in 1.8:
 24 "Training shall be offered in each year for staff
 25 with designated emergency response roles, and shall take

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1 the form of specific training sessions, seminars and
 2 talks, and workshops."
 3 In relation to training for staff with designated
 4 emergency response roles, such as Council Gold, do you
 5 accept that that was less frequent than each year?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. Why was that?
 8 A. I don't think there's a good reason for that lack.
 9 I think that we did have occasional emergencies, so some
 10 part of the emergency provision was tested in reality,
 11 but it did not directly involve my unavoidable
 12 participation as Council Gold.
 13 Q. Were you aware, as David Kerry has told us, that for the
 14 role of Council Silver, in other words those who were to
 15 lead the operational response, there was no formal
 16 training programme at any time before the Grenfell Tower
 17 fire?
 18 A. I wasn't aware of that. What I would have said is that
 19 I set some store by David's considerable experience and
 20 I think evident expertise in the matter, and I would
 21 have thought that he would have offered -- been offering
 22 training to an adequate level, and I think he did take
 23 part in such things, but I wouldn't be able to tell you
 24 the quantum or the sufficiency of it.
 25 Q. Let's then turn back to the topic of training on London

18

1 Local Authority Gold and London Resilience.
 2 You refer in your statements to LLAG, London Local
 3 Authority Gold. Is it the position, just in general
 4 terms, that that is a pan-London mechanism which can be
 5 activated in response to an emergency, drawing on the
 6 resources of all 33 local authorities, led by a single
 7 chief executive?
 8 A. Correct.
 9 Q. Yes, and those arrangements -- again, I think this is
 10 correct and common ground -- are underpinned by
 11 something called a Gold resolution; yes?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. Which was I think a document passed in 2011. Were you
 14 familiar with that?
 15 A. I've certainly read it.
 16 Q. It was passed on behalf of each London Borough Council
 17 and the City of London.
 18 Now, you mention in your statement that you were
 19 inducted into the role of London Local Authority Gold --
 20 this is at paragraphs 47 and 48 of your statement (sic)
 21 [{RBK00035426/3}, paragraph 14], there is no need to go
 22 to it, we can take it quickly -- but that was as part of
 23 your role as town clerk, was it?
 24 A. It was me taking my place in that rota, yes, correct.
 25 Q. Right. Do you remember when you were inducted into that

19

1 role?
 2 A. Not precisely, no. I think it ... I would have thought
 3 it would have been 2014 or 2015.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 Now, let's go to {RBK00036752}. What I'm showing
 6 you is an email chain in June 2017, before the fire.
 7 If we go to page 2, please, foot of that page, and
 8 go over to page 3 {RBK00036752/3}, this is an email
 9 between your PA, Sally Spriggs, and David Munroe; yes?
 10 A. Yep.
 11 Q. And David Munroe is, as is said clearly there, a London
 12 Resilience support officer. It's an email from him to
 13 you, inviting you, I think, to a strategic response
 14 training session for chief executives on 20 June.
 15 A. That might well have been what I was referring to.
 16 Q. Yes.
 17 Now, had you had that type of training before
 18 June 2017?
 19 A. I think so, yes.
 20 Q. When was that?
 21 A. Well, I don't remember. It would have been in my diary,
 22 and I would have attended it with Tony Redpath at the
 23 facility in -- just over from Lambeth Bridge, that would
 24 have been activated for a London-wide emergency.
 25 Q. Right.

20

1 Now, if we go back to page 2 {RBK00036752/2},
 2 please, we can see the response from your PA,
 3 Sally Spriggs, back to David Munroe, second half of the
 4 page. This is 5 June 2017. She says:
 5 "David
 6 "Under the 'Event Prerequisites' it refers to
 7 a number of documentation that delegates should
 8 familiarise themselves with. Nicholas wants to have
 9 a look at these but I don't have access to either of the
 10 sites mentioned. Are you able to send me the documents
 11 or send me a link so that I can print these off."
 12 The materials were listed at the top of the thread.
 13 Take this from me, they were -- well, we can go to the
 14 top of the thread, if you like. Can we go, please, to
 15 the top of page 1 {RBK00036752/1}, we can see what they
 16 were. Third email down, she specifies them, and they
 17 are:
 18 "-- London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) Arrangements
 19 and the Gold Resolution.
 20 "-- Strategic Coordination Protocol ...
 21 "-- London Resilience Partnership Plan Summaries.
 22 "-- London Recovery Management Protocol.
 23 "-- Humanitarian Assistance Framework."
 24 Those are the documents.
 25 Had you seen any of those materials before?

21

1 A. I think I had, yes --
 2 Q. Were you familiar -- sorry.
 3 A. So certainly the first one, probably the second one.
 4 I'm not sure about the others.
 5 Q. Did you have them to hand?
 6 A. I doubt I would have done.
 7 Q. Right. Can you explain why you hadn't seen the ones you
 8 hadn't seen before?
 9 A. I don't think I've got a particular reason why
 10 I wouldn't have seen them. I don't recall anyone
 11 alerting me to the need to look at them.
 12 Q. Right.
 13 Do you know how your PA was aware of what documents
 14 specifically to ask for?
 15 A. No.
 16 Q. Did you ask her to seek out this list of --
 17 A. I'd be very surprised if I'd been able to compile that
 18 list.
 19 Q. Right. So she must have got it from somewhere.
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. Do you know where?
 22 A. Well, probably from Mr Munroe, if he knew the
 23 composition.
 24 Q. Right.
 25 Now, you can see from this email that David Kerry is

22

1 the addressee of this email.
 2 A. Yeah.
 3 Q. You can't tell us whether there was a conversation
 4 between them or where she got that information from?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. No.
 7 Now, our Inquiry records show, and particularly
 8 Mr Sawyer's witness statement at {GOL00001349/4},
 9 paragraph 14 -- we don't need to go to it -- that you
 10 were on call on a number of dates in 2016, both as
 11 primary and as secondary London Local Authority Gold.
 12 Do you remember that?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Were you actually called on when you were on call?
 15 A. I don't believe so, no.
 16 Q. Right.
 17 How could you be on call to act as London Local
 18 Authority Gold without knowing what the arrangements
 19 were and without being familiar with --
 20 A. Well --
 21 Q. -- the resilience partnership plan summaries --
 22 A. Sure.
 23 Q. -- and the other documents you hadn't seen?
 24 A. Sure. Well, that implies that at an earlier date
 25 I would have read these documents. It is quite possible

23

1 that I would have done. All that I can remember of the
 2 training is the visit to the location from which we
 3 might have had to run a London Gold operation.
 4 So, I mean, I think I've confused myself slightly.
 5 I hadn't realised the dates on these emails. I mean,
 6 these emails are obviously, you know, just before the
 7 fire. The London Gold induction that I had was some
 8 time before that, as I said in response to one of your
 9 earlier questions, and if that training had embraced
 10 these documents, then I would have read those documents
 11 at that time, But they do not, as it were -- I would not
 12 be able to tell you the content of those documents now.
 13 Q. No. So, sorry, just to be clear, at the times when you
 14 were on call as LLAG, you were familiar with or had
 15 access to the last three documents in that five-document
 16 list, but not at the time of the proposed training in
 17 2017?
 18 A. Correct. That seems to me the most likely thing. But
 19 it would be checkable. Somewhere in the exchanges of
 20 email, particularly around the time that I did the
 21 induction, there should have been some evidence of these
 22 documents being sent over.
 23 Q. Right.
 24 A. I mean, the danger is, if they're bulky, they would have
 25 been sent in hard copy and, therefore, there wouldn't be

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1 an email trail necessarily .
 2 Q. But can we leave it this way: that at the time of the
 3 fire , although you may or may not have had a previous,
 4 historical familiarity with them in your role as
 5 London Gold, they weren't imprinted on your brain or
 6 sitting on your shelf?
 7 A. Correct.
 8 Q. Yes, I see.
 9 Now, looking back on the internal and external
 10 training that you received yourself , do you consider now
 11 that you were suitably equipped to deal with
 12 an emergency of the scale of the Grenfell Tower fire?
 13 A. Undoubtedly not.
 14 Q. In which particular ways did you or do you consider
 15 yourself ill -equipped?
 16 A. I think that it is possible that in the several years in
 17 which I served as a chief executive, I picked up the
 18 notion that the chief executive in many cases was very
 19 dependent upon the staff that were steeped in training.
 20 I think I'd also picked up some belief or some view that
 21 because there were a great variety of crises that could
 22 hit , actually preparing in -depth for each and every one
 23 of them was more than boroughs could cope with, and
 24 of course the wrong conclusion to draw from that is that
 25 one had to put up with being a generalist who would

1 suddenly be confronted with a very specific disaster ,
 2 and I think that that was the quandary that certainly
 3 I felt we were in, and maybe others would have felt that
 4 similarly .
 5 Q. Right. Can I just see if I can understand that answer.
 6 Was the problem that because of the infinite variety
 7 of kinds of major disaster that could befall London and
 8 befall RBKC in particular, you had no choice, or you
 9 felt at the time, to be anything more than a generalist?
 10 Is that what you're saying?
 11 A. That's pretty much it, yes.
 12 Q. Right, I see.
 13 Let's then turn to the question of capacity.
 14 As at June 2017, had you yourself undertaken any
 15 kind of assessment to satisfy yourself as chief
 16 executive that RBKC, as a category 1 responder, had
 17 sufficient trained staff to undertake specialist roles
 18 in an emergency, such as Council Silvers and officers to
 19 operate the BECC?
 20 A. No.
 21 Q. Why not?
 22 A. Because I would have hoped that people who were more in
 23 touch with the specific needs would have alerted me if
 24 we were in deficit .
 25 Q. So reliance on negative reporting?

1 A. Well, I think that if I had formed a view that that
 2 function was poorly staffed or that the people there
 3 lacked expertise or professional skills , then I would
 4 have been much more on alert. But I actually thought
 5 that the council was quite blessed with the staff that
 6 we had. The core team had not suffered reductions in
 7 the spending pressures that had befallen a lot of other
 8 parts of the council, and I felt confident that if there
 9 were shortcomings, I was creating a culture ,
 10 a management culture in the council, where people would
 11 feel able to say and put me on alert.
 12 And indeed, if I may make one other point, in
 13 successive funding rounds each year, the cabinet member
 14 for finance and I were very anxious to find areas where
 15 the general pressure relentlessly to make economies had
 16 to be overcome in the opposite direction if there was
 17 something that we really couldn't economise on any
 18 further .
 19 Q. Was it not the position that, in or as at June 2017, you
 20 knew there was an insufficient number of trained staff
 21 to deal with a contingency?
 22 A. I think the history is that David Kerry had rightly
 23 warned me that we had too few. We had attempted to
 24 recruit some more, and the numbers had gone up, but then
 25 they had come down again, and I cannot remember whether

1 I knew the last bit or not, but I would expect there to
 2 be email evidence to that effect .
 3 Q. You told us in your last answer that the core team had
 4 not suffered reductions because of spending pressures,
 5 and you felt confident that if there were shortcomings,
 6 you had a culture where you could be alerted.
 7 My question is: well , had you not been alerted to
 8 the fact that there were shortcomings in staff capacity
 9 in order to address a contingency?
 10 A. I think that -- well, there's a distinction in my mind,
 11 which doesn't sort of satisfy the question, but there's
 12 a distinction in my mind between people paid full-time
 13 to fulfil full-time or a very large part of their time
 14 in an emergency planning role, and then others who
 15 forewent their normal duties and became part of the
 16 emergency planning team if required. So I'm referring
 17 to the former group that I don't think suffered
 18 reductions. The latter group I know had fluctuated in
 19 number, and I certainly accept that, by the time of the
 20 fire , there were too few of them.
 21 Q. Right, thank you.
 22 Let's just take the documents quickly and see what
 23 you can recall .
 24 Do you remember that the problem about staffing was
 25 raised with you as long before the fire as October 2014,

1 in a report written or prepared by David Kerry,
 2 entitled, "Emergency Staff Recruitment and Retention"?
 3 A. That's right, and that's what I remember responding to
 4 and trying to encourage more people to volunteer.
 5 Q. Right. Let's just put that up so everybody can see what
 6 we're discussing. {RBK00058038}. There is the report,
 7 8 October 2014. In the box, "FOR DECISION":
 8 "The Council has insufficient trained volunteers for
 9 major incident emergency management roles in the Borough
 10 Emergency Command Centre. Support from Executive
 11 Directors is sought."
 12 Then at page 1 lower down, paragraph 1.2, it says:
 13 "There is now a significant shortfall in the numbers
 14 of trained volunteer emergency management staff
 15 required. Traditional recruitment methods no longer
 16 generate new volunteers. Demands from the 'day job' are
 17 curtailing attendance at required training sessions and
 18 emergency exercises. Support is now sought from
 19 Executive Directors."
 20 I'm assuming you saw that at the time?
 21 A. I think so, yes.
 22 Q. What did you do about it?
 23 A. Well, I supported attempts to recruit more volunteers.
 24 Q. Right, and did those succeed?
 25 A. I think they did temporarily, and then the numbers fell

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1 away again.
 2 Q. Right.
 3 We come then to January 2016. Do you remember at
 4 that stage David Kerry expressing concerns to you about
 5 the numbers of staff in the role of Borough Silver and
 6 incident response officers?
 7 A. I wouldn't remember it off the top of my head, but if
 8 David told me so, then that must be the case.
 9 Q. Right.
 10 Let's look at {RBK00058008}. This is an email chain
 11 in January 2016 where he raises this particular problem
 12 with you.
 13 If we pick it up at the foot of page 4
 14 {RBK00058008/4}. In the usual time—honoured way, the
 15 email has become separated from its heading at the
 16 bottom of the page. This is from you to David Kerry,
 17 copied to Tony Redpath, 19 January 2016. Over the top
 18 of page 5 {RBK00058008/5}:
 19 "David
 20 "A colleague at my 'brown bag' lunch today suggested
 21 that there had been a decline in staff willing to form
 22 part of a crisis support team from across the Council.
 23 Is this recognisable as a concern and correct; if so,
 24 what shall we do about it?"
 25 Now, just pausing there, you were posed this

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1 question. Was the decline in staff, as it were, the
 2 rise and then the fall, something that happened between
 3 October 2014 and the first report from David Kerry we've
 4 just seen, and January 2016, so 14 months?
 5 A. I would think so.
 6 Q. Right.
 7 Then if we turn over, please, to page 2
 8 {RBK00058008/2}, we can see David Kerry's response at
 9 the foot of page 2 to you.
 10 A. Yeah.
 11 Q. "Nicholas
 12 "Crisis Support Team.
 13 "Yes, this is a current concern.
 14 "The Crisis Support Team is a group of volunteers
 15 from across the Council who have been trained to provide
 16 emotional support to people affected by a major
 17 emergency or incident in the borough. They will
 18 normally be deployed in the first hours of an emergency,
 19 most likely to a Survivor Reception Centre or a Friends
 20 and Relatives Reception Centre. The team will normally
 21 work with people over 18 years old."
 22 Then on page 3 {RBK00058008/3}, his response refers
 23 to the BECC staff and the two roles that he says are of
 24 concern, and you can see the heading:
 25 "1. Borough Emergency Controller — the Tactical

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1 Commander (Silver)."
 2 And he sets out the figures there, ideally ten
 3 senior managers.
 4 Then "BECC Officers", and over the page to page 4
 5 {RBK00058008/4}, the numbers. He says:
 6 "Two roles in the BECC:
 7 "BECC Supervisor (manages the BECC staff and
 8 systems) — currently 7 volunteers (I would like at least
 9 10).
 10 "BECC Officers ... currently 11 volunteers (I would
 11 like at least 20)."
 12 Then he says:
 13 "A big concern with our BECC staff, apart from the
 14 difficulty in recruiting new volunteers (over the past
 15 couple of years there have been recruitment drives
 16 within Policy and Partnerships Unit and to staff
 17 generally via KCBriefly) is their availability to attend
 18 training."
 19 You see that?
 20 A. Yep.
 21 Q. Now, very little appears to have changed from his report
 22 in October 2014 and his email in January 2016, apart
 23 from perhaps the recruitment drive to which you've
 24 referred and to which he refers here. Is that right?
 25 A. I think that's probably fair, yeah.

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1 Q. Then if we go, please, to page 1 of this email run
 2 {RBK00058008/1}, you respond, 26 January 2016, to him:
 3 "David
 4 "Belated thanks: so you will kindly seek recruits to
 5 the former and let Tony and me know if that works. I am
 6 happy to bang a drum for BECC personnel. Pl[ease] can
 7 you do a draft extolling the roles?"
 8 What action did you take to ensure that there was,
 9 in the end, the necessary number of BECC staff?
 10 A. Well, if there is further email traffic with such
 11 a draft, then I would have used that to try and attract
 12 some volunteers.
 13 Q. Let me show you what Mr Kerry told us in his oral
 14 evidence.
 15 Can we please have the transcript up for
 16 {Day268/66:2}. I'll just wait for this to come back up
 17 on to the screen.
 18 A. Yeah.
 19 (Pause)
 20 Q. We can live with what's there.
 21 Mr Holgate, can you see the text with the moving
 22 hand?
 23 A. I think so, yeah. Yes.
 24 Q. If the hand stops moving, I can read it.
 25 It says:

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1 "It had been the philosophy at RBKC for as long as
 2 I was there to not have people appointed to roles and be
 3 on rotas, and certainly not to pay them to be on
 4 standby, but to seek volunteers for these roles.
 5 "There are other reports I had done in past years,
 6 one or two reports over the years, expressing the same
 7 concerns and considerations."
 8 That's all I need from that.
 9 Why was there a philosophy not to pay staff to
 10 undertake these important roles as in other boroughs,
 11 such as LBHF?
 12 A. Well, I think we were probably stuck with a practice
 13 that we should have changed. I mean, I gather
 14 the council does now pay people for fulfilling these
 15 roles and we should have made that switch sooner.
 16 Q. Right. I mean, it wasn't a problem about money, it was
 17 just a problem about adhering to old practices; is
 18 that --
 19 A. I think so, yes.
 20 Q. I see. I see. And Mr Kerry told us that the position
 21 as at January 2016 in numbers terms was pretty much at
 22 rock bottom, he said, and didn't substantially improve
 23 thereafter. That's what he told us at
 24 {Day268/70:10-11}.
 25 Is that right? Was it the position by June 2017

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1 that the overall numbers of trained emergency staff at
 2 RBKC had continued to decrease?
 3 A. I've no reason to disagree with him.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 Do you accept, looking back on it, that the lack of
 6 staff had a huge effect on the ability to train and
 7 exercise RBKC contingency plans?
 8 A. It probably would have affected the capacity to train
 9 other people, yes.
 10 Q. Yes.
 11 We've seen from other material provided by Mr Kerry
 12 that the overall number of borough controllers or BECC
 13 staff reduced from 24 to 20 by August 2016 and then down
 14 to 16 by December 2016. Those are the numbers. Do they
 15 surprise you?
 16 A. I wouldn't have known them at the time. They don't
 17 surprise me, given what we now know.
 18 Q. Therefore, would you accept that there remained
 19 a significant shortfall in the number of Council Silvers
 20 trained to occupy that role as at June 2017?
 21 A. Yes. I mean, that is compared to the number that David
 22 thought was needed, and I would look to him to assess
 23 such a number.
 24 Q. There were three, compared with the recommended ten that
 25 Mr Kerry had recommended.

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1 A. Mm--hm.
 2 Q. Now, let's then turn to a different topic: minimum
 3 standards for London.
 4 We've heard some evidence about this, that RBKC, in
 5 relation to its category 1 responder duties, fitted into
 6 the London Resilience Forum; yes? And this is
 7 a structural point. Do you agree with that?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. Do you also agree -- and we've seen plenty of structural
 10 material about this, so we can take it quickly -- the
 11 London Resilience Forum, or LRF, is split up into sector
 12 panels, which represent the interests of different
 13 sectors; yes?
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. And you knew that at the time?
 16 A. I think so.
 17 Q. And you understood that that included, did you, the
 18 local authorities panel; yes?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. And that brought together 33 local authorities across
 21 London; yes?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And at the time of the fire was chaired by
 24 John Barradell --
 25 A. Yes.

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1 Q. -- from the City of London.
 2 A. Correct.
 3 Q. Yes.
 4 Were you aware at the time that RBKC resilience
 5 capability was governed by something called the minimum
 6 standards for London, or MSL, which was set by the local
 7 authorities panel?
 8 A. I don't think I'd have been able to volunteer that
 9 information to you at the time. I might have been aware
 10 but I don't recall it.
 11 Q. Very well.
 12 Now, let me just show you a document, {LFB00119219}.
 13 This is the draft minimum standards for London 2016.1,
 14 which was in operation, even though it's called a draft,
 15 as at June 2017.
 16 Were you familiar, as at June 2017, with this
 17 document?
 18 A. It rings a bell, but I wouldn't be absolutely certain.
 19 Q. No. I mean, the photograph on the front cover is --
 20 A. Striking.
 21 Q. -- striking.
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And you would probably recall that; yes?
 24 A. Mm.
 25 Q. And you don't recall it?

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1 A. I wouldn't be able to tell you what was in it now.
 2 Q. Right. So you'd seen it, but you can't recall it?
 3 A. I think I probably had, not only for the picture, but
 4 also the sort of logo at the top. As I say, it does
 5 ring a bell.
 6 Q. Yes. That logo, the multicoloured --
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. -- set of Olympic-looking rings all in a string appears
 9 on a number of different London Resilience documents.
 10 A. Mm.
 11 Q. And the LAP logo on the right-hand side is something we
 12 will also be seeing as we go through.
 13 But if we go, please, to page 7 {LFB00119219/7},
 14 paragraph 9, do you remember that these minimum
 15 standards included an assessment of the operational
 16 response and contingency plans? You can see
 17 paragraph 9, "MSL Assessment".
 18 A. Yes, I wouldn't have remembered that.
 19 Q. Right.
 20 Did you know that the most recent assessment before
 21 the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017 took place in
 22 February 2016?
 23 A. Right. I wouldn't have known that.
 24 Q. Right. Did you know what the outcome of the assessment
 25 was? Probably not, if --

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1 A. No.
 2 Q. -- you didn't know the fact of it.
 3 Were you aware -- and I'm going to assume not, but
 4 correct me -- that the RBKC scores included amber, which
 5 meant operational but requires development, for four
 6 particular areas: first, borough-level exercising;
 7 second, humanitarian assistance; third, shelter; and
 8 fourth, identification of vulnerable persons?
 9 A. No, I'm sure I did not know that, because I think that
 10 would have caused me some alarm.
 11 Q. Whose job was it to report those deficiencies in the
 12 assessments pursuant to the LAP requirements for minimum
 13 standards?
 14 A. Well, I would have thought it would be the staff
 15 compiling our returns.
 16 Q. Right. Was there a system in place within the RBKC
 17 whereby the results of those returns would be reported
 18 to you if they were significant?
 19 A. I do not think I got regular reports of that material.
 20 Q. Should you have done?
 21 A. I'm sure I should have done, yeah.
 22 Q. Does that indicate that there was a deficiency in RBKC's
 23 oversight systems in relation to preparedness?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Were you aware that, for the appointment of

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1 a humanitarian assistance lead officer, or a HALO, that
 2 that had scored red, which meant there was no
 3 operational capability or plan in place?
 4 A. No, I wasn't aware of that.
 5 Q. Right. Would you agree that that role, the HALO role,
 6 is a pivotal one in the event of a significant
 7 emergency?
 8 A. I would.
 9 Q. And that is -- is this right? -- because the holder of
 10 that role requires knowledge of the council emergency
 11 plans and the wider London Resilience humanitarian
 12 assistance framework?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Yes.
 15 Did you yourself appreciate the importance of the
 16 role of a HALO?
 17 A. I think I did.
 18 Q. Before the fire?
 19 A. I think I did, yeah.
 20 Q. Did you ever ask yourself or anybody else in your
 21 organisation: "Do we have one, and if we don't, why
 22 don't we?"
 23 A. No. I think, again, if I'd joined the dots, I mean,
 24 I would obviously have been very concerned, but I think
 25 I knew of the role in the abstract and I -- if you'd

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1 have asked me the question, (a) I would have asked David
 2 or Tony Redpath, and (b) I'd have assumed it would be
 3 someone in the adult social care directorate.
 4 Q. Well, now, under (b), of course, adult social care was
 5 subject to the tri-borough arrangements, wasn't it?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. So had you asked -- did it occur to you, perhaps, that
 8 if you'd looked at that role, you may very well have
 9 ended up identifying somebody who was not employed by
 10 RBKC at all?
 11 A. Well, the idea of the tri-borough service was for staff
 12 to be flexible across all three boroughs. So even if
 13 their contract of employment had been with one of the
 14 other two, they would have owed duties to Kensington and
 15 Chelsea as well.
 16 Q. How common were tri-borough arrangements across London?
 17 A. They were unusual. They were an innovation that began
 18 to be planned in 2010 in response to the reductions in
 19 funding of local authorities that I mentioned earlier.
 20 Q. Right.
 21 From your knowledge of the LAP, was it common or
 22 universal, perhaps, that a HALO would be appointed from
 23 an adult social care department?
 24 A. No, I wouldn't have necessarily -- I wouldn't know where
 25 HALOs came from across London at large.

1 Q. Right.
 2 What I'm really seeking to get at is whether in
 3 those cases where a HALO would or should be appointed
 4 from adult social care, there were some boroughs where
 5 the HALO would come from within the borough, but some
 6 boroughs, in the unusual case of a tri-borough
 7 arrangement, where they wouldn't, RBKC being one of
 8 them. Can you help with that?
 9 A. Well, I think what you have is an innovation in the form
 10 of tri-borough working for which not necessarily every
 11 consequence had been worked through from the perspective
 12 of something like resilience.
 13 Q. Do you remember yourself being involved in any
 14 discussions about whether the tri-borough arrangements
 15 for sharing, pooling adult social care, meant that there
 16 was an uneven distribution of the ability to have
 17 an in-borough HALO across London?
 18 A. No, I don't remember any --
 19 Q. You see the point I'm driving at?
 20 A. Yes, I do.
 21 Q. Do you accept that, structurally, RBKC as a body and its
 22 senior management and decision-makers had no system in
 23 place whereby they knew that the council was in the
 24 respects I've identified, the amber and the red, failing
 25 to live up to the minimum standards for London set by

1 the LAP?
 2 A. I do. As far as I can recall, I do not recall such
 3 an item appearing on any collective management agenda.
 4 Q. And in terms of governance and scrutiny, that was
 5 a failing on your part and on the part of the council.
 6 A. I agree.
 7 Q. Thank you.
 8 As you told us earlier, I think you accept all the
 9 admissions made by RBKC in its written opening in this
 10 module.
 11 A. I do.
 12 Q. That would include the admission that there should have
 13 been more internal reporting up the management chain and
 14 should have been greater oversight, both of the team
 15 itself and the council's emergency response
 16 capabilities?
 17 A. I absolutely accept that.
 18 Q. Yes.
 19 Let's then go to {RBK00058010}. This is an email
 20 run of March 2017, so a little bit less than
 21 three months before the Grenfell Tower fire, and it is
 22 an exchange between David Kerry and Tony Andrews of
 23 Westminster City Council, and we've heard a bit about
 24 Tony Andrews from earlier witnesses in this module, and
 25 it involves a query about the current state of play with

1 humanitarian assistance board issues. It's a lengthy
 2 email from David Kerry to Tony Andrews:
 3 "Hi Tony
 4 "Sorry I was not able to speak by phone today --
 5 a rather hectic day, dashing from meeting to meeting."
 6 Then there are four topics set out there. I just
 7 want to focus on topics 3 and 4:
 8 "3. Emergency Rest Centre Staff: We have very few
 9 Council staff trained as Emergency Rest Centre managers
 10 and staff. We will, of course, call upon the British
 11 Red Cross under the MoU for ERC staffing, but this is,
 12 of course, not a guaranteed service. Our last
 13 recruitment drive (using KCNet) did not result in any
 14 new volunteers. Training for Council staff volunteers
 15 would be carried out for us by British Red Cross under
 16 the MoU."
 17 Now, is it right that the last recruitment drive,
 18 the one that occurred, I think, between October 2014 and
 19 January 2016, hadn't produced new volunteers for
 20 emergency rest centre staff?
 21 A. I've no reason to doubt that.
 22 Q. Looking at item 4, then, "Identifying Vulnerable
 23 People", David Kerry says:
 24 "This remains a considerable concern at RBKC. As
 25 discussed at the last meeting of the Humanitarian

1 Assistance Board, RBKC does not have a good system for
 2 accessing details of vulnerable people out-of-hours."
 3 Then he goes on:
 4 "Unlike LBHF, we do not have a Welfare Bronze on
 5 Rota. Unlike WCC, we do not have a Tony Andrews on 24/7
 6 call."
 7 Then he goes on about it being raised, and also the
 8 possibility of a tri-borough Welfare Bronze rota.
 9 This issue, it appears, was something to be raised
 10 at senior level. My question for you is: were you aware
 11 of that issue, the problem he identifies here?
 12 A. I don't think I was.
 13 Q. Should you have been?
 14 A. I think I should have been, yes.
 15 Q. Again, does that point to a failure of oversight and
 16 a structural deficiency in RBKC's management line
 17 reporting?
 18 A. I'm not entirely sure. I think that there is a balance
 19 between the person at the top continually prodding all
 20 those reporting to him or her, and a certain duty on
 21 those in possession of important information like this
 22 to keep emitting it to people who are accountable for it
 23 in the end.
 24 Q. Yes.
 25 A. And, you know, plainly that didn't work often enough.

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1 And I think what one might say in David Kerry's defence
 2 is that probably he felt that this was a thing he was
 3 banging his head against a wall on, and maybe he decided
 4 not to carry on doing that.
 5 Q. Can you account for why RBKC did not have a good system
 6 for accessing details of vulnerable people out of hours?
 7 A. No, I can't.
 8 Q. Can you account for why RBKC did not have a Welfare
 9 Bronze on rota, as its neighbour borough did?
 10 A. If that is an absolute requirement, then we should have
 11 had such a person on the rota. I would not have known,
 12 off the top of my head, that that was an absolute
 13 requirement or a desirable requirement.
 14 Q. Can you account for why RBKC, unlike Westminster, its
 15 other neighbour borough, did not have a Tony Andrews,
 16 a humanitarian assistance expert, on 24/7 call?
 17 A. No. Again, we should have done, plainly.
 18 Q. Do you agree, in the light of that, that RBKC, at least
 19 in those respects, was ill-prepared and incapable to
 20 meet its duties as a category 1 responder at the time of
 21 the fire?
 22 A. I think ill-prepared. I don't know whether we could
 23 have made up by other means. I don't know how incapable
 24 we should have been even with those deficiencies.
 25 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Can I just ask you: was this

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1 a matter of a combination of identifying the persons who
 2 would fill these roles and perhaps paying them to do it?
 3 A. I agree that, as the council I gather has now done, we
 4 should have taken the bull by the horns and made it much
 5 easier for people.
 6 I think probably we should have gone even beyond
 7 that, with the benefit of hindsight, and we should have
 8 said: "Your role" — you know, to a number of people
 9 showing some willingness to take on such
 10 a responsibility, "Your role will only be 80% or 90%
 11 what it was before, and now it will be 10% or 20% of
 12 an emergency planning nature, and maybe your pay will
 13 need to be adjusted accordingly".
 14 So, you know, we should have had a more structural,
 15 sort of reliable answer than just relying on volunteers.
 16 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you.
 17 MR MILLETT: Now, I want to turn, please, next, to the
 18 events of 14 June 2017 and to start with the initial
 19 attendance on site.
 20 In your statement you tell us that you first learnt
 21 of the fire at Grenfell Tower just before 3 am, when you
 22 woke up and heard the headlines; yes?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. You go on to tell us at paragraph 18 of your statement
 25 {RBK00035426/4} that you immediately rang David Kerry,

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1 the RBKC contingency planning manager, to get an update;
 2 yes?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. And thereafter spoke with the leader and with
 5 Laura Johnson, who was director of housing; yes?
 6 A. Correct.
 7 Q. And also, I think, officers from the media and
 8 communications team.
 9 A. I think so.
 10 Q. At what time do you recall attending the scene?
 11 A. I think it would have been around 4.30, probably.
 12 Q. Right. And why do you remember that particularly?
 13 A. Well, because it — I think I was busy on email and the
 14 phone for a while. I had retrieved the copy of the
 15 emergency plan in the flat, and then after a while my
 16 wife got up and we agreed that it would be a very
 17 sensible thing to go and look at the circumstances
 18 around Grenfell Tower. So we probably set off around
 19 4.00, something like that.
 20 Q. Right.
 21 Now, at paragraph 19 of your statement — let's go
 22 to that, please, at page 4, your first statement.
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. Well, {RBK00035426/4}.
 25 You say at paragraph 19, having explained the visit

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1 to Harrow Youth and Community Club and the Rugby
 2 Portobello Trust:
 3 "At any one time, there were two to four
 4 rest centres in various stages of helping survivors .
 5 From what I saw, I was content that the rest centres
 6 were functioning properly. It was also clear that the
 7 Council's response would involve many Council services
 8 and staff."

9 What did you see to lead you to the conclusion that
 10 the rest centres were functioning properly?
 11 A. Well, I remember seeing one that had capacity but wasn't
 12 being fully used, and I remember at least one other that
 13 was very busy indeed, but they, you know, seemed to be
 14 helping people.
 15 Q. Did you see anybody from the council at any of those
 16 places?
 17 A. No, I didn't.
 18 Q. Did you ask yourself why not?
 19 A. I think I knew that there would have been the local
 20 authority liaison officers prompting, where necessary,
 21 and encouraging people to open up facilities, but
 22 I didn't expect them to be numerous, nor did I expect
 23 other council staff to be there that early, because,
 24 I mean, a very critical fact which I think you covered
 25 with Laura Johnson yesterday is that the great majority

1 of borough staff live outside the borough, sometimes
 2 quite a long way away, and therefore there would have
 3 been a lag in people making arrangements to come to the
 4 borough much earlier than usual and getting there.
 5 Q. That was a known problem, though, wasn't it?
 6 A. Yeah.
 7 Q. If an event happened outside office hours for which the
 8 contingency arrangements were required to be activated,
 9 then that was a known problem.
 10 A. Yes, and I thought that we had some measures that would
 11 have mitigated against that risk .
 12 Q. And what were those measures?
 13 A. Well, I thought that we had agreement with several
 14 voluntary organisations in North Kensington for such
 15 an eventuality .
 16 Q. What, to take the place of RBKC staff?
 17 A. Well, to be rest centres in the short term.
 18 Q. No, but what I'm really asking you is access to your own
 19 paid staff at short notice in the event of a major
 20 emergency happening between the hours of, let's say,
 21 5.30 pm in the evening and 9.30 or 9.00 am in the
 22 morning.
 23 A. Well, I think I could move both the evening time and the
 24 morning time to reduce the range when there would be
 25 significant staff, because people worked very hard in

1 normal days, let alone days like that tragedy. But it
 2 is, I'm afraid, true that, you know, most staff were not
 3 living in or particularly close to the borough.
 4 Q. Yes. I'm sorry to harp on. What consideration was
 5 given to putting in place arrangements to have staff on
 6 hand, on call, in an emergency which happened out of
 7 normal routine office hours?
 8 A. Yes, I think there were telephone trees, essentially .
 9 There were arrangements whereby people would ring their
 10 direct reports so the message would get out very quickly
 11 that there was a crisis to deal with, and I think people
 12 would then respond as best they could to come in as
 13 early as they could in this case.
 14 Q. Thank you.
 15 Now, you attended the scene and had seen first-hand
 16 the scale of the fire and the sheer number of people
 17 directly affected. What did you assess your immediate
 18 priorities to be at that time?
 19 A. Particularly with my conversation with Laura Johnson,
 20 I thought the most urgent thing was to, via our housing
 21 officers and social workers, get practical support to as
 22 many of the survivors as we could. So financial
 23 support; non-financial support where, for instance,
 24 someone needed a medical prescription and that needed
 25 sorting out very quickly; and, of course, shelter, by

1 the time of the next evening.
 2 Q. Does that tell us that your priority at that stage, that
 3 very early stage, was the survivors?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Yes.
 6 What consideration did you give to those who were
 7 not survivors from the tower but had been evacuated or
 8 were in the process of being evacuated from the
 9 walkways?
 10 A. Well, really, much the same considerations apply to
 11 them. I mean, the focus was the people who had had the
 12 terrifying experience of being at risk -- direct risk
 13 from the fire and who would probably have had to
 14 evacuate their flats with little or nothing to help
 15 them. But I think that quite quickly the borough tried
 16 to do what it could for those laterally affected, as it
 17 were, by the fire .
 18 Q. And what about the families of those who were living in
 19 the tower and needed information about their loved ones?
 20 A. Well, I have to say that wasn't absolutely at the top of
 21 my list, but I realise, of course, that it's a very
 22 important service.
 23 Q. Why wasn't it at the top of your list?
 24 A. Because I was more worried about the people who had had
 25 this terrifying experience and who needed to be

1 supported as soon as we could get there.
 2 Q. Now, at the time you were at the scene, I think the
 3 staff present were limited to two LALOs, and I think
 4 a third then attended later; yes?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. Nicholas Layton and Mike Rumble and a third. Is that
 7 correct?
 8 A. I've no reason to doubt that.
 9 Q. It's right, I think -- and correct me if this is
 10 wrong -- that additional staff did not attend to assist
 11 at rest centres until after 10 am that morning?
 12 A. I thought that they -- at least some might have got
 13 there sooner than that, and plainly one would wish them
 14 to have got there sooner than that. I don't know what
 15 obstacles, you know, each member of staff faced in order
 16 to get to somewhere where they could be of help as
 17 quickly as possible, but I am sure that it was their
 18 intent to get there as well equipped as possible, as
 19 quickly as possible, and that they would have had to
 20 judge how to surmount the obstacles to do that.
 21 Q. Do you think that lag of time until after 10 am that
 22 morning was acceptable?
 23 A. Well, it obviously isn't acceptable. If people begin
 24 a process that is absolutely horrifying and deeply
 25 traumatising any time after about 12.30 or 1 o'clock in

1 the morning, it is a long time to cope before people
 2 come with a specific duty and some empowerment to help
 3 you. Plainly that is a very long wait.
 4 Q. Do you accept that it was the responsibility of RBKC to
 5 set up and to operate an emergency rest centre --
 6 A. Yes, I do.
 7 Q. -- within the meaning of the protocol?
 8 A. Yes, I do.
 9 Q. And do you think that more staff could and should have
 10 been deployed earlier in order to assist at those
 11 emergency rest centres?
 12 A. Well, I think that that is a little difficult. But,
 13 again, it's a bit like the point the Chairman made
 14 earlier. What we could have done is we could have had
 15 more staff billeted closer to the borough or we could
 16 have paid them an allowance or something like that.
 17 But, you know, I'd be intrigued to know whether others
 18 had different ways of solving it. I think the closest
 19 we came to an answer was to have an understanding with
 20 voluntary bodies who had facilities, who had premises --
 21 so it wasn't just lack of staff, it was actually lack of
 22 facilities. We had an office or two in
 23 North Kensington. We didn't ourselves own some large
 24 space which would have been re-purposed automatically
 25 for this.

1 Q. Now, I'd like to turn next to the strategic
 2 co-ordination group meetings. You cover that at
 3 paragraph 10 in your statement, page 3 {RBK00035426/3}.
 4 At paragraph 10 you say:
 5 "Borough Gold would work closely with non-Borough
 6 agencies to coordinate the response, notably the
 7 Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG), of which I was
 8 a member, and which was chaired by the
 9 Metropolitan Police."
 10 Do you accept that the core function of the SCG was
 11 to create and maintain shared situational awareness,
 12 among other things?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. And the first SCG in relation to this incident was at
 15 5 am, wasn't it?
 16 A. I believe so.
 17 Q. Yes, and the second at 6.30; yes?
 18 A. Probably.
 19 Q. Well, my point is you didn't attend either of those, did
 20 you?
 21 A. No, I didn't know, I think, that they were occurring,
 22 and others, I think, attended on my behalf.
 23 Q. You didn't know they were occurring?
 24 A. I don't think so, otherwise I would have done my best to
 25 take part.

1 Q. Right. Can you account for why you weren't aware that
 2 they were occurring, given that you were the chief
 3 executive?
 4 A. Well, I would have -- someone would have told me.
 5 Q. Yes, and did they?
 6 A. Well, I don't think they did, no. I think they -- it's
 7 probably David, took it on himself to attend on behalf
 8 of -- on my behalf, and, you know, I would not criticise
 9 him for doing that. David at that stage was probably
 10 the best junction box the council had available to bring
 11 the council's perspective to the SCG.
 12 Q. Yes, but should he not have told you of the fact of the
 13 meetings, if not the 5 am one, when you were still
 14 perhaps going around familiarising yourself on scene,
 15 but at least the 6.30 one?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. When did you discover that those meetings had happened?
 18 A. I daresay he would have referred to them when we met in
 19 the Town Hall --
 20 Q. Right.
 21 A. -- around about 6.30 or thereabouts.
 22 Q. Yes.
 23 Let's pick that up in your statement.
 24 A. Sure.
 25 Q. Page 4 {RBK00035426/4}, please, paragraph 20. You say:

1 "I arrived at the Town Hall at about 6.00am and went
2 straight to the BECC. I recall that David Kerry and
3 others were there."

4 Was that not an opportunity to attend this SCG
5 meeting?

6 A. I think it would have been. As I say, I can't account
7 for the fact that, you know, somebody didn't hunt me out
8 and tell me that it was taking place.

9 Q. No. Did you not even overhear the fact that it was
10 taking place or see David Kerry go off to it?

11 A. I don't recall doing so. It may well be that he was
12 doing something which seemed to be important that he
13 carry on doing.

14 Q. Now, others have given evidence — well, there is
15 contemporaneous evidence, notably an email from
16 Toby Gould at 8.04 — and for reference purposes, that's
17 {GOL00000218} — that says that "Nicholas Holgate was on
18 the 06.30 SCG via teleconference". I think you're
19 telling us that's not the case.

20 A. I don't — well, it is possible — it's possible that
21 I was, but I don't recall ... I don't recall, as it
22 were, outputs of that meeting or exchanges at that
23 meeting which would have anchored me there. But,
24 I mean, you know, if someone else thinks I was there,
25 I'm reluctant to disagree with them.

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1 Q. What did you do at the BECC when you arrived?

2 A. I think I wanted to get an idea from David and others
3 there of their appraisal of the situation and tell them
4 what I thought was the priority.

5 Q. Did you observe any problems, problems with the IT,
6 problems with setting up the log?

7 A. Not at that point, no. I think — I'm now aware that
8 there had been a problem or two, but I don't think it
9 was evident by the time I got there.

10 Q. Right.

11 When you did arrive, did anybody report to you? Did
12 anybody give you a sit rep, situation report?

13 A. I think David would have done, yes.

14 Q. Now, you did attend the third SCG meeting at 8.30; yes?

15 A. Mm—hm.

16 Q. Let's look at the note, first of all, just to pin that
17 down. {MOL00000014}. This is an email from Toby Gould.
18 I'm sorry — yes, there it is:

19 "Major Incident — North Kensington.

20 "London SCG Minutes: 08.30, 14 June 2017."

21 And you can see the time; you see that?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And the attendees are on page 5 {MOL00000014/5}. Just
24 for pattern purposes, the attendees of these SCG
25 meetings are always in a list at the end of the

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1 document.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. If you cast your eye down the list, about halfway down
4 you can see:

5 "Local Authorities: Nicholas Hollgate [misspelt]
6 (Kensington & Chelsea)."

7 Along with Rebecca Blackburn, Stuart Priestley and
8 David Kerry; yes?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. So you were at the meeting.

11 A. Mm—hm.

12 Q. Now, let's just look at something else briefly,
13 {GLA00000004}. This is the statement of Jon—Paul Graham
14 of the GLA. He is head of city operations.

15 If we go in that statement, please, to paragraph 41,
16 which we will find on page 8 {GLA00000004/8}, he covers
17 the strategic co—ordination meeting of 8.30. In
18 paragraph 41, he said in the second line of your
19 attendance at that meeting that you:

20 "... seemed very interested in my proposal [which
21 was one of liaising with RBKC about the Mayor's visits]
22 and insisted that RBKC be involved in any such
23 arrangements. I was very surprised at this and it
24 seemed, again, to reinforce RBKC's skewed priorities in
25 the aftermath of the fire. Mr Holgate seemed to be more

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1 preoccupied on this call with minor issues such as the
2 Mayor's proposed visit to the scene and the possible
3 attendance of Nicholas Paget—Brown (Leader of RBKC),
4 rather than more important strategic issues regarding
5 the handling of this crisis."

6 Is that a fair observation or criticism?

7 A. I think it's absurd.

8 Q. Why do you say that?

9 A. Because it would have been — it would have had a very,
10 very modest importance, but in the sense that someone
11 like the Mayor was visiting, we would — you know, it
12 would be a matter of courtesy to know and to be aware of
13 it. But, you know, the idea that it was an important
14 issue compared with all the others is plainly absurd.

15 MR MILLETT: Yes, thank you.

16 Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?

17 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes, if it suits you, I think it is.

18 MR MILLETT: Yes.

19 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Well, Mr Holgate, as you were told,
20 we have a break during each session, and this is the
21 time to have the morning break. We'll stop there,
22 therefore, and resume, please, at 11.35.

23 THE WITNESS: Certainly.

24 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: As I have said to all the other
25 witnesses, you no doubt know this, but I have to ask you

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1 not to talk to anyone about your evidence or anything
 2 relating to it while you're out of the room.
 3 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right? Thank you very much.
 5 Would you go with the usher, please.
 6 (Pause)
 7 Thank you, Mr Millett. 11.35, please. Thank you.
 8 (11.17 am)
 9 (A short break)
 10 (11.35 am)
 11 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Right, Mr Holgate, ready to carry
 12 on?
 13 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 14 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Good, thank you.
 15 Yes, Mr Millett.
 16 MR MILLETT: Thank you, Mr Chairman.
 17 Now, let's take a step an hour or so back to the
 18 time of your arrival in the BECC.
 19 Between the time of your arrival in the BECC at
 20 about 6.00 or 6.30 am on the morning of 14 June and the
 21 SCG meeting at 8.30, did you have any discussion with
 22 Tony Redpath or Stuart Priestley or David Kerry about
 23 seeking support from other councils, either through
 24 mutual aid on an ad hoc basis or through activating the
 25 Gold resolution?

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1 A. I think I would have remembered without the prompting of
 2 David's and Stuart's evidence that David, I think I can
 3 just about remember, did say that the fire was
 4 an exceptional crisis, and I'm more than prepared to
 5 accept that Stuart advised seeking mutual aid. So there
 6 was such a discussion, in answer to your question.
 7 Q. And what did you do with that advice?
 8 A. At that time, I had given some thought as to whether we
 9 should invoke London Gold or not. I think there is
 10 an important distinction between invoking London Gold
 11 and accepting or seeking mutual aid across councils. So
 12 I think at no point was I against obtaining specific
 13 assistance from other councils where we knew we needed
 14 it, but at that point I did not think that we needed to
 15 invoke London Gold as such.
 16 Q. Why is that?
 17 A. Well, I'd given this as much thought as I could in the
 18 circumstances of the morning, and I thought that
 19 I had — and would still today, for the specific
 20 officers in question — I had great confidence in the
 21 management team of the borough to respond well and to do
 22 a great deal of what was necessary as quickly as they
 23 could, and what I wanted to do was balance — was to try
 24 and work out whether it was better that the council
 25 responded as a cohesive management team, or whether it

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1 was better to bring in someone who was not familiar with
 2 the borough, who would undoubtedly have brought
 3 a handful of London Resilience people with him or her,
 4 and who would have had to set up and get to know, as it
 5 were, not just the physical geography but the human
 6 geography and who was trying to do what already within
 7 the council.
 8 So at that time I thought that there was
 9 an advantage to responding as the council, with
 10 assistance where we knew we needed it, rather than
 11 passing the problem, huge problem, to AN Other chief
 12 executive of another London borough who was simply the
 13 person on the rota.
 14 Q. Now, let's go, please, to {RBK00013296}. This is
 15 slightly later in the morning. This is David Kerry's
 16 BECC emergency incident log, which is his typed log,
 17 based on his handwritten notes, as he told us. He was
 18 satisfied that they were comprehensive, so I think we
 19 have to assume that that is the case, at least in this
 20 respect.
 21 If I can take you, please, to page 10 in this
 22 document {RBK00013296/10}, row 2, 10 o'clock. Do you
 23 see that?
 24 A. Yeah.
 25 Q. 10 am, item 3. It says:

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1 "Meeting with David Kerry, Chief Executive
 2 Nicholas Holgate, Director of Housing Laura Johnson, CEO
 3 K&CTMO Robert Black, Council Silver Stuart Priestley."
 4 Do you remember that meeting?
 5 A. Not as such, but I'm absolutely happy to accept what
 6 David says about it.
 7 Q. Right.
 8 Now, let's go, then, to the right—hand side of the
 9 page. It says in the second bullet point:
 10 "Advice given by David Kerry to Nicholas Holgate:
 11 " ■ This incident is bigger than any one local
 12 authority in London can manage.
 13 " ■ Consideration should be given to asking for
 14 mutual aid for the BECC.
 15 " ■ There are people who can support NH and RBKC Gold
 16 Group, including:
 17 " ■ John Barradell [and you can see his designation
 18 there] ...
 19 " ■ Eleanor Kelly ... Southwark ...
 20 " ■ Andrew Meek, EP Manager Haringey — London's
 21 expert on humanitarian assistance.
 22 " ■ Alistair Ayres ... Hammersmith & Fulham — managed
 23 the Dedicated Disaster Mortuary for the Tunisia
 24 shootings."
 25 Did you consider at that stage taking that advice

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1 and using mutual aid that was available?
 2 A. Well, again, I think there is a distinction between
 3 seeking specific assistance where we knew we needed it,
 4 and invoking London Gold as such.
 5 So I was perfectly happy for the BECC to be
 6 reinforced by people practised at managing BECCs from
 7 other boroughs, and I talked to -- I think Eleanor Kelly
 8 got in touch with me in the course of the morning, and
 9 you have some emails between me and her, and I think --
 10 but this is the faintest memory -- I think that in the
 11 event Alistair Ayres thought that he should stay at
 12 Hammersmith and Fulham and stand up their BECC in case
 13 that was the right and helpful thing to do, but I may be
 14 quite wrong about that.
 15 Q. Now, what was your response to David Kerry's advice that
 16 this incident is bigger than any one local authority in
 17 London can manage?
 18 A. Well, I wasn't expecting us to cope with it just as one
 19 local authority. I was going to and would be happy to
 20 accept help where it was required.
 21 I also had tried to work out what it was that we
 22 would need to do, and it was plainly -- you know,
 23 there's no argument that it was an extremely big
 24 disaster, but to me, the priority was reaching the
 25 survivors, as we have said, and I had high confidence in

1 the borough's ability to be able to do that, and
 2 I thought that that was what we ought to do.
 3 So having convinced myself -- however erroneously,
 4 we can now see -- that I thought it was better to have
 5 the responsibility cohesively run from -- with a group
 6 of people who knew how to work together in ordinary
 7 times, could work together very well, then, having
 8 convinced myself of that, I thought it was our duty and
 9 our responsibility to get on with it, and that was why
 10 I didn't then invoke London Gold.
 11 Q. Well, that's London Gold, but we're talking about mutual
 12 aid really here --
 13 A. Yeah, well --
 14 Q. -- which is the subject of the second bullet.
 15 Just breaking it down: first, did you agree with
 16 David Kerry, your expert in these matters, that the
 17 incident was bigger than any one local authority could
 18 manage? Did you agree with that?
 19 A. Not quite, no.
 20 Q. Why not?
 21 A. So -- because I had by then discussed what Laura was
 22 planning to do, and I think I may also have been in
 23 touch with Claire Chamberlain, I can't remember, but she
 24 is the executive director of children's services, and
 25 I thought that there were some very clear and urgent

1 tasks and the borough was capable of addressing those
 2 tasks.
 3 So, you know, it is one thing to say it is a huge
 4 crisis; it is, but one then has to quantify or compare
 5 the tasks to which that gives rise and the tasks of
 6 which the council was capable, and I thought that if we
 7 proceeded as a team, working together, knowing one
 8 another well, the council would be able to respond
 9 effectively, at least to begin with. I wasn't sure
 10 about, you know, days later, as it were, but to begin
 11 with, that was what I thought we should do.
 12 Q. So is it the case, then, that consideration was given by
 13 you to seeking mutual aid, but you rejected it and
 14 didn't, or rather you rejected the advice that you
 15 should go to the people identified for support?
 16 A. Well, as I say, Eleanor Kelly and I did -- I think we
 17 both emailed and conversed soon after -- is this
 18 10 o'clock? Yeah. Well, it would have been, I think,
 19 later in the morning, but you have an email to that
 20 effect.
 21 Q. Now, let's go to {RBK00013318}. This is
 22 Stuart Priestley's log of Wednesday, 14 June 2017.
 23 I should just tell you, this is not a contemporaneous
 24 note; it was made in the days after the incident.
 25 If we go, please, to the bottom of page 1, you can

1 see it says:
 2 "06.30 -- Meeting with: Robert Black, Laura Johnson,
 3 Nicholas Holgate, David Kerry: David provided an update
 4 as had been feedback to him by the on-site LALO and
 5 gathered from the meeting he had dialled into. DK
 6 advised of the scale of the tragedy. Robert reported he
 7 had attended the site and it was very serious indeed.
 8 Nicholas advises he has spoken with the Leader who has
 9 agreed to fund anything necessary for the relief effort.
 10 David advised Nicholas of the mutual aid arrangements
 11 available via LLAG and our neighbouring boroughs.
 12 Nicholas stated 'That looks like we can't cope'. The
 13 conversation on mutual aid at that point ceased.
 14 Nicholas agreed to use the 11.00 Senior Management Board
 15 meeting as the first Gold Group. David Kerry confirms
 16 he forgot to call Tony Redpath. I agreed to do so now."
 17 Then if one goes on, one can see that there are
 18 later meetings, but no 10 o'clock meeting. So in timing
 19 terms, there is a discrepancy between this record and
 20 the emergency log.
 21 A. Sure.
 22 Q. First, do you remember whether the meeting that is
 23 described here was at 6.30 am, when you would just have
 24 arrived at the BECC, or at 10 am, some hours afterwards?
 25 A. Well, it could have been both, of course. I think it's

1 quite likely that we met on both -- around both times.
 2 Q. Right.
 3 Do you recall, first, David Kerry advising on the
 4 scale of the tragedy?
 5 A. Again, as I said earlier, I don't exactly, but I'm
 6 absolutely happy to accept his account of it.
 7 Q. Do you accept that you said, when David advised you of
 8 the mutual aid arrangements available via LLAG and the
 9 neighbouring boroughs, "That looks like we can't cope"?
 10 A. I'm not sure I would have used exactly those words, but
 11 again, if that's what Stuart recalls, I'm very happy to
 12 accept them. They are not a happy choice of words.
 13 Again, what I mean by that is that, however erroneously,
 14 I thought that the borough could achieve the tasks
 15 immediately in front of it, and, yes, we would need
 16 reinforcement, but the reinforcement could be specific
 17 and as necessary. It did not need to be put into
 18 a different process entirely.
 19 Q. What do you mean by the tasks immediately in front of
 20 it?
 21 A. Well, essentially reaching the survivors.
 22 Q. Right. When you say reaching the survivors, what do you
 23 mean by that?
 24 A. And offering them all the help we could, to give them
 25 shelter the next night, to give them money, to try and

1 sort out specific difficulties they have and to begin
 2 a process, you know, and a long relationship and process
 3 of trying to rehouse and so on. But that was further
 4 off in the future.
 5 Q. But was it not right that at that stage you didn't know
 6 how many survivors there were and you didn't know what
 7 the boundaries of this event were?
 8 A. That's true. I thought -- I mean, I was implicitly
 9 working on the assumption that there were a lot of
 10 survivors and that the borough would be able to give
 11 many of them, hopefully all of them, help as soon as
 12 possible on that day.
 13 Q. What about your own staff? Given the pre-existing
 14 difficulties to which Mr Kerry had drawn your attention
 15 historically, why did you think that the borough could
 16 cope even with these tasks immediately in front of it,
 17 given the numbers of staff in the BECC available?
 18 A. Well, for some crises, the BECC is a very significant
 19 part of a borough's response. In this particular case,
 20 the BECC was still very important as a junction box for
 21 exchanging, passing on information in several
 22 directions, but actually the housing department, as is
 23 evident from Laura Johnson's statement yesterday and
 24 your conversation with her, was going to work as
 25 a department pretty much entirely on the tasks as we've

1 described it, and, you know, that brought a huge number
 2 of people with relevant expertise to begin to reach the
 3 survivors.
 4 Q. Now, there are two different things. Let me just
 5 explore them with you.
 6 A. Yeah.
 7 Q. There is one, which is your perception of whether in
 8 fact RBKC could cope with the tasks immediately in front
 9 of it or tasks which are more intermediate, and there's
 10 the look of the thing.
 11 When you are recorded as saying, "That looks like we
 12 can't cope", were you concerned about the look of the
 13 thing?
 14 A. I don't think so.
 15 If I can backtrack just a little, you referred
 16 earlier to my civil service experience, and you know
 17 that civil servants are meant to be objective,
 18 impartial, neutral, and indeed council officers
 19 similarly, and I would assert very strongly that
 20 throughout my career I have been bothered about the
 21 substance, not the appearance.
 22 So I agree that it is a form of words which conveys,
 23 you know, an impression that I would not wish to give,
 24 but actually, I thought we were substantively capable of
 25 beginning the process of recovery, and if, having set

1 lots of people working and people feeling they had the
 2 chief executive right behind them in doing so, I then
 3 say, "Well, hang on a minute, you know, perhaps somebody
 4 else should take over and let's, you know, listen to
 5 what they've got to say", and so on, then I think that
 6 is giving off a rather uncertain note, and I do not
 7 think that that would have contributed positively to the
 8 exercise, and I think that is what I was trying to say.
 9 Q. Right. Just to be clear, are you quite sure that, in
 10 saying what you're recorded as saying, you weren't at
 11 the time feeling a need to protect the council's
 12 reputation from inevitable criticism about being
 13 understaffed or having the lack of preparedness or
 14 capability?
 15 A. Absolutely not, and indeed, if I had had that uppermost
 16 in my mind, it would have been a completely
 17 self-defeating proposition and I would not have
 18 entertained it.
 19 Q. Now, Rebecca Blackburn refers in her first statement --
 20 we don't need to go to it, it's paragraph 21 on page 5
 21 {RBK00035364/5} -- to a meeting between the contingency
 22 management team at 8.10, between you, David Kerry, her
 23 and Tony Redpath. Do you remember that?
 24 A. I don't bring it to mind, no.
 25 Q. You don't remember a discussion involving her at that

1 stage, do you, about mutual aid?
 2 A. I don't. Which is not to say that I dispute that it
 3 happened. I absolutely don't dispute it.
 4 Q. Do you accept -- I think you do, because you've told
 5 us -- that, as RBKC has admitted in its opening
 6 statement, in fact the leadership was unable to cope in
 7 the days after the fire?
 8 A. I think that's absolutely right.
 9 Q. And I think you accept now that it was an error -- or do
 10 you accept -- not to have sought outside help, including
 11 activation of London Local Authority Gold, at this early
 12 stage?
 13 A. I do. I do. Under a duty of candour, I would retain
 14 a sort of very small quibble that we are imagining
 15 a complete counterfactual if I had invoked London Gold
 16 early on, and I think it begs a whole set of questions
 17 about exactly what would then have happened. But
 18 I agree and accept that, not least given the thematic
 19 evidence from the survivors that you had a week or so
 20 ago, we were not coping very early on.
 21 Q. Thank you.
 22 Let's then turn to London Resilience and the contact
 23 you made with them on the morning of the 14th.
 24 Is it right that your initial contact with London
 25 Resilience, beyond where you were copied in to the SCG

1 minutes, happened after you had spoken with David Kerry
 2 and senior management at the BECC?
 3 A. Probably, yes.
 4 Q. Yes. Now, at {GOL00000173} we find an email. Let's go
 5 to that, please. I would like to go straight in it,
 6 please, to the foot of page 2 {GOL00000173/2}, where you
 7 can see an email at 7.44. There it is, thank you. It's
 8 from Toby Gould to you. Do you see that? Copied to
 9 David Kerry:
 10 "Nicholas, (Andrew LLAG to 09.00, Chris LLAG from
 11 09.00)."
 12 The Chris is the incoming LLAG.
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. That refers to the on-duty LLAG, doesn't it?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. Chris, I think, is Chris Naylor.
 17 A. Correct.
 18 Q. "I tried to call but appreciate you are very busy.
 19 "I understand you spoke to Matthew Hogan from our
 20 team earlier this morning and confirmed you were content
 21 for Kensington & Chelsea to participate in the SCG
 22 meetings/teleconferences. Please let me know if that
 23 position changes and you feel there would be benefit in
 24 London Local Authority Gold participation to lead on any
 25 pan-London issues. I am not aware of any at present

1 given the scene is contained within Kensington &
 2 Chelsea."
 3 You see that?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Then it goes on about standing people up. We may come
 6 back to that.
 7 But you respond to Toby Gould, who is at London
 8 Resilience, at the bottom of page 1 {GOL00000173/1}, if
 9 we can go to that, please. At the foot of page 1, you
 10 can see it says -- and this is you at 7.50:
 11 "Toby
 12 "Thanks: aside from housing needs that may well
 13 spill over borough boundaries, I do not (yet) think LLAG
 14 needs to gear up."
 15 What did you mean by, "I do not (yet) think LLAG
 16 needs to gear up"?
 17 A. Well, I -- whatever else I thought that we were capable
 18 of doing, I knew that there was a possibility that we
 19 may not be capable of doing it. So, you know, it would
 20 have been bizarre to have had 100% confidence in
 21 a decision or in a view taken, inevitably with some
 22 shortage of information, as to whether the borough had
 23 an advantage in being the core of the response or
 24 whether a bigger response that over time -- perhaps
 25 quite quickly, perhaps not so quickly -- would have

1 drawn from other boroughs in a much more -- in a much
 2 larger fashion.
 3 So, you know, at no point -- this rather illustrates
 4 my point that at no point was I sort of manically
 5 against assistance, but I was first in favour of
 6 specific assistance where we needed it, and only later,
 7 you know, when it became more obvious, did I invoke
 8 London Gold.
 9 Q. So is it right or would it be fair to characterise your
 10 approach at this stage as incremental?
 11 A. Er --
 12 Q. You were waiting to see how things developed before
 13 deciding whether to invoke London Gold?
 14 A. I think that would be slightly too kind. I think I --
 15 Q. Right.
 16 A. -- was probably more confident of being able -- of the
 17 borough being able to give a very good account,
 18 you know, to be able to make very good inroads into the
 19 various tasks lying ahead of it for, say, at least
 20 Monday -- sorry, at least the Wednesday, at least the
 21 first day.
 22 Q. Do you recall having contact with the incoming duty
 23 LLAG, Chris Naylor?
 24 A. I do.
 25 Q. Right. I think he confirmed to you in a brief

1 conversation in that morning that he remained on standby
 2 and at your disposal; yes?
 3 A. Indeed.
 4 Q. Very good.
 5 Let's then turn to the TMO, if we can.
 6 We've seen from David Kerry's BECC log that
 7 Robert Black, the chief executive of the TMO, was
 8 present at the BECC that morning and present at the
 9 Council Gold meeting at 10 o'clock.
 10 Do you accept that the civil contingency
 11 responsibilities for the response lay with RBKC, as
 12 a category 1 responder, and not with the TMO in any
 13 capacity?
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. Yes.
 16 Now, we've heard in Phase 1 of the Inquiry how
 17 a list of residents and plans of the building were not
 18 provided to LFB on the night quickly. When information
 19 was provided, we have also heard it was incorrect or out
 20 of date, and that's the subject of the Phase 1 report at
 21 paragraph 30.96 {INQ00014817/710}, if people want to see
 22 it.
 23 My question for you in the light of that is: do you
 24 accept that the responsibility for providing that kind
 25 of information lay with the council, even if they might

1 need to co-operate with the TMO to get it?
 2 A. I'm not sure I'm fully qualified to give that answer,
 3 but I would accept that it lay across the TMO and
 4 the council, and if the TMO didn't have it, then plainly
 5 the council should or could have had it.
 6 Q. Let me try it slightly differently.
 7 So far as RBKC needed to have up-to-date and
 8 accurate information about who was living where and
 9 whether they had vulnerabilities or not in order to
 10 discharge its obligations under the contingency
 11 legislation, regulations and framework, that was RBKC's
 12 responsibility, even if the information wasn't held
 13 within the council?
 14 A. I think you must be right, yeah.
 15 Q. What was the role of Robert Black at the Town Hall and
 16 Gold meetings on the 14th?
 17 A. Well, I think that he would want to have been
 18 co-operating and his staff to be aware of the overall
 19 picture, and this would have assisted his understanding
 20 of what the council was doing, and, I mean, he could
 21 have worked with the housing department without him
 22 being in the Gold meeting, but the Gold meeting was as
 23 convenient a place as any other where, you know, he and
 24 Laura would be hearing the same material and working out
 25 what to do together.

1 Q. What were your expectations of him and the assistance he
 2 could give you?
 3 A. I thought that he could probably provide more staff,
 4 some of them with knowledge of some of the residents of
 5 Grenfell Tower, but I wasn't expecting a huge amount,
 6 because I didn't know in depth the staff numbers or
 7 capacities that he would be able to provide.
 8 Q. What did you understand the wider role of the TMO to be
 9 in responding to this emergency?
 10 A. Well, I'd have thought that they might have assisted in
 11 a small way with some rehousing, and I'm surprised that
 12 they -- their information on who was resident in the
 13 tower was so imperfect, but I wouldn't have gone a long
 14 way further than that.
 15 Q. Were you aware that TMO staff were assisting at
 16 rest centres and continued to create, to maintain and to
 17 circulate lists of safe or missing residents from the
 18 tower to identify who needed support?
 19 A. I think I probably was available -- I was aware of that,
 20 because I think probably Robert would have made that
 21 clear.
 22 Q. Did you know that lists which were created, maintained
 23 and circulated continued to have inaccuracies in them?
 24 A. I think I knew that they were not absolutely right, but
 25 they were what we had to work with.

1 Q. Right.
 2 Was it the case that RBKC was heavily reliant on the
 3 assistance of the TMO throughout the time that RBKC was
 4 leading the response, not just in relation to housing
 5 data but physically?
 6 A. I think I was aware that the TMO led on work to make the
 7 finger blocks habitable. So I was aware of some
 8 specific roles they undertook which were, I mean, very
 9 much part of their housing management function, but
 10 I don't think I'd have known much more than that.
 11 Q. Right. I mean, was it the case that RBKC, in the event,
 12 had in essence outsourced its functions to TMO staff?
 13 For example, assisting at rest centres and triaging
 14 survivors.
 15 A. I think "outsourcing" might be too proactive a word.
 16 I think that TMO staff probably sought to give what help
 17 they could wherever they could, and that -- those were
 18 amongst the things they ended up doing.
 19 Q. Well, let me try it non-proactively. Did you understand
 20 that the TMO were coming in to fill a gap in RBKC's
 21 capabilities?
 22 A. I would not have described it that way if asked on the
 23 day. I'm perfectly prepared to accept it if that's how
 24 others slightly closer to what they were doing would
 25 have described it.

1 Q. Well, how would you have described it on the day?
 2 A. I would have said that they were an extra resource and
 3 they were improving on the response that the council
 4 would otherwise have been able to achieve.
 5 Q. In what way improving?
 6 A. Well, more pairs of hands, more people able to make
 7 a better rest centre at the Westway, for example.
 8 Q. But you're not saying that they were surplus to
 9 requirements?
 10 A. No, I'm sure that we could have done with more people
 11 still .
 12 Q. Okay. So that answers my question.
 13 A. Okay.
 14 Q. Let me try it again, though: do you accept that they
 15 were coming in to fill a gap, in other words to make
 16 right what was wrong?
 17 A. I don't know what we would have achieved without them
 18 being there compared to what we would have achieved with
 19 them being there. I'm very reluctant to say no to your
 20 question, because if they were there in sufficient
 21 numbers, and given that the overall effort fell short of
 22 what we wanted to achieve, I think you have to be right
 23 as a matter of logic.
 24 Q. As a matter of logic, maybe that's right, but as
 25 a matter of what you understood or saw at the time, did

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1 you think at the time that RBKC, as a category 1
 2 responder, was unable to fulfil a number of its
 3 obligations without the assistance of the TMO?
 4 A. I wouldn't have -- I don't think I would have thought
 5 that on the day.
 6 Q. But do you accept it now?
 7 A. I readily accept it now.
 8 Q. Yes.
 9 Is it also right that, on the day of the fire, you
 10 personally received several offers of assistance from
 11 colleagues in local government, including chief
 12 executives from other London Councils?
 13 A. Yes, certainly .
 14 Q. And I think you have referred to Eleanor Kelly in your
 15 evidence earlier this morning. We've seen that she at
 16 the time was chief executive of Southwark, and you
 17 referred to an email on that morning.
 18 Let's look at it. It's at {GOL00000309}. I think
 19 it's also at {GOL00000376}, because it's been referred
 20 to before.
 21 This is an email, first in chain, to you at 6.50, so
 22 if we go to the bottom of the chain, please.
 23 A. Yeah.
 24 Q. 6.51, I apologise. Eleanor Kelly to you at 6.51, copied
 25 to Gerri Scott at Southwark:

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1 "Dear Nicholas,
 2 "Just reaching out to offer any help we can to your
 3 officers regarding the serious fire in your Borough. As
 4 you are aware, we experienced the terrible fire in
 5 Lakanal House and so we have people across the Council
 6 with both experience and understanding. Please do not
 7 hesitate to put any department in touch with us.
 8 "Best ...
 9 "Eleanor."
 10 You replied, if you go up the chain, please, at --
 11 actually, we have this reply in a different email, which
 12 is {GOL00000376}. That's it. That's where you say at
 13 6.56, in response to this email:
 14 "Eleanor
 15 "Many thanks. I will certainly be in touch if we
 16 need to be."
 17 Just pausing there, were you aware at the time of
 18 the fire that Eleanor Kelly was deputy chief executive
 19 during the Lakanal House fire in July 2009?
 20 A. Probably not, but I knew -- I could see the link between
 21 her as chief executive of Southwark and Lakanal House,
 22 so I could see that she had relevant expertise.
 23 Q. Did you consider whether you could in fact benefit from
 24 her experience of leading a response following a major
 25 incident where a fire had occurred in a high-rise

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1 building in her borough?
 2 A. Yes, but I think that her offer -- and we did talk,
 3 I think, on the phone, and the offer I took up, which
 4 was in your other extract, was for the director of
 5 housing and another Southwark officer to come to the
 6 first Gold Group on the Thursday.
 7 Q. Yes, and we'll come back to that in just a moment.
 8 That's a response at 13.31.
 9 A. Yeah.
 10 Q. There are one or two communications between 6.56 and
 11 13.31 I just want to show you.
 12 First, {RBK00001253}. This is your email that you
 13 I think pass on to Laura Johnson. This is at the top of
 14 the string --
 15 A. Yeah.
 16 Q. -- at 7.37.
 17 A. Yeah.
 18 Q. Also to Stella Baillie, who was at LBHF.
 19 A. In fact, she was a very experienced RBKC employee in
 20 adult social care who was on Hammersmith and Fulham's
 21 books, or she had an email address both in Hammersmith
 22 and Fulham and RBKC.
 23 Q. As part of the tri-borough arrangements?
 24 A. Yes, but she originated in RBKC and knew an awful lot
 25 about the borough.

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1 Q. Right, I see.
 2 And then copied to David Kerry, and all you say is:
 3 "Please let us call on Southwark colleagues if we
 4 have anything on which they might be able to help."
 5 Is it fair to say that you didn't at that point know
 6 how the council might use help from Southwark?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. Yes. Yes, thank you.
 9 Then let's look back at the 13.31 email at
 10 {GOL00000309}. This is your response back to
 11 Eleanor Kelly again, and you say:
 12 "Eleanor
 13 "Thanks again: Chris Naylor has put me in touch with
 14 Jonathan Toy. And the Director of Housing here is in
 15 touch with your director, Gerri [?].
 16 "If you have any particular names or specialisms to
 17 put forward, I would be grateful. Just occasionally,
 18 people do not say there are struggling when they are so
 19 having a few names and a few words on the role each
 20 played/could play would help me if I sense we are
 21 running on empty."
 22 How likely did you envisage that RBKC would be
 23 running on empty, as you put it, during the response, at
 24 that stage?
 25 A. Well, at that stage, not.

1 Q. Not.
 2 A. But I think the picture began to change 24 hours later,
 3 essentially .
 4 Q. Right. So does that tell us that you considered the
 5 level of response required by RBKC to be sustainable in
 6 at least the short term?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. What about in the medium term, did you think about that?
 9 A. Yes, I did, and I was particularly concerned about the
 10 range of centres and facilities which needed to be set
 11 up so that, as according to the contingency management
 12 plan, there was everything that the survivors, the
 13 bereaved and others would need. So it was beginning —
 14 perhaps not on the Wednesday, but certainly on the
 15 Thursday — to begin to worry me quite a lot, that we —
 16 whether we had the capacity, management capacity, to be
 17 doing all those things at once.
 18 Q. Now, is this right: the second person you got assistance
 19 from or you got an offer of assistance from was
 20 Mary Harpley, who was the chief executive of Hounslow;
 21 yes?
 22 A. I don't recall what order they came in, but it's quite
 23 likely that she did, yes.
 24 Q. Right.
 25 Let's go to {RBK00064627}. This is her email to you

1 at 9.35, which I want, second email down on the string,
 2 subject, "Any help you need, just ask". Do you see
 3 that?
 4 A. Yeah.
 5 Q. She says:
 6 "If any of us here at Hounslow, members or officers,
 7 can help you and colleagues in any way at all today or
 8 over the next days, please just ask.
 9 "Thinking of you.
 10 "Mary."
 11 You respond to that at 10.31:
 12 "Thank you for thinking of us: we should be able to
 13 manage but if I see any shortfalls , I shall be in
 14 touch!"
 15 Now, this is after, in chronological terms, as we've
 16 seen, the either 6.30 or 10 o'clock meeting that you had
 17 had internally with Robert Black, David Kerry and
 18 Stuart Priestley , where the advice was given to you to
 19 consider LLAG or mutual aid.
 20 Can we take it that at this point you had, as is
 21 clear here, essentially refused to do that or rejected
 22 that advice, and made a decision that you were going to
 23 continue to manage?
 24 A. I still at that stage thought it was better to take
 25 responsibility myself as a Gold, but I was not, as it

1 were, adamant in any way that we in every particular
 2 would have all the staff that we needed, and it felt to
 3 me, as it happens, these sorts of messages were very
 4 encouraging, because I thought that we would — if we
 5 identified a shortfall , I knew that there were
 6 neighbouring boroughs that would respond very positively
 7 if we asked them for a particular, you know, housing
 8 officer , social worker, media, whatever it would be.
 9 Q. I see.
 10 Looking then at {RBK00064675}, second email down in
 11 this chain, this is an email from Helen John at the DWP,
 12 central government, she was in the stewardship
 13 directorate, to you, subject, "Dreadful news", timing,
 14 8.41:
 15 "If there is anything I can usefully do, let me
 16 know. Work won't miss me for a day or two.
 17 "Take care ...
 18 "Helen John ..."
 19 Your response is at 13.25, if we look at that, as we
 20 can see:
 21 "Helen
 22 "Thanks and very kind of you: we think we are
 23 coping. The main things are intensely practical at this
 24 stage: hotel rooms, cash and buying people essential
 25 goods."

1 Were those your priorities at that stage?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Right.
 4 A. And for the avoidance of doubt, of course, this wasn't
 5 the DWP officially, this was a colleague whom I'd worked
 6 with when I was a civil servant offering help in
 7 a personal capacity.
 8 Q. I understand. But no doubt about it, if central
 9 government and the full force of central government was
 10 being offered through your personal contact and you
 11 needed it, you could have had it.
 12 A. Well, we may come to central government, but --
 13 Q. We will.
 14 A. -- it wasn't clear, really, what they could or would
 15 offer.
 16 Q. All right.
 17 Would you agree, though, thus far, that the
 18 consistent message from you to those who offered help
 19 from early on on 14 June was that RBKC was managing and
 20 didn't need help for the time being?
 21 A. I thought we were managing, yes.
 22 It may be worth dwelling on this a moment longer, in
 23 the sense of saying: if you are in the position of
 24 sending several dozen and at times scores, even
 25 according to a note hundreds of staff out to do certain

1 tasks, there is a period of time in which belief is --
 2 disbelief is suspended, and you don't know for certain
 3 how well they are or are not achieving those tasks. So
 4 it isn't -- the feedback is not necessarily
 5 instantaneous, and sometimes what you do get fed back
 6 may not tell you exactly what you need to know in terms
 7 of asking for more help for this task or that.
 8 Q. Now, another source of help was Charlie Parker at
 9 Westminster. I think you knew him quite well.
 10 A. Yeah.
 11 Q. And I think it's right that he called you in the early
 12 days because he was worried about you personally; is
 13 that right?
 14 A. I think that's correct.
 15 Q. Do you remember him telling you on either 14 or 15 June
 16 that RBKC would not be able to cope?
 17 A. Not in so many words, no.
 18 Q. Not in so many words.
 19 Let's go to {GOL0000158}, please. Now, you're not,
 20 I think, on this email chain, which is perhaps the
 21 point, but if you go to the foot of page 1, which is
 22 where it starts, this is now 15 June 2017 at 9.42 pm, so
 23 it's the evening of 15 June, and it's from
 24 Charlie Parker at Westminster to John Barradell and
 25 Eleanor Kelly at Southwark, subject, "Kensington".

1 "Both
 2 "I just wanted to say well done for getting Nicholas
 3 to agree to London Resilience help. I have tried to get
 4 him to recognise this is too big for RBKC and we have
 5 offered a wide variety of help but, he hasn't been able
 6 to acknowledge that it would be necessary. I fear he
 7 doesn't quite understand the implications and wider
 8 significance of what's going on. However, I have had
 9 a long conversation with him tonight especially about
 10 his personal resilience and a range of operational
 11 issues. We have offered a number of key personnel
 12 including a colleague who handled all the Southwark fire
 13 comms in 2013 -- I think?"
 14 Then it goes on about permanent housing
 15 opportunities.
 16 Do you recall a conversation with Charlie Parker
 17 before the evening of 15 June 2017 when he did try to
 18 get you to recognise that the incident was too big for
 19 RBKC?
 20 A. I don't think that he said that in those terms. I think
 21 what he may have done is seek to explore what we were
 22 doing and how we were coping in such a way as to prompt
 23 me to reach such a conclusion.
 24 So, you know, I think that if a number of local
 25 authority chief executive colleagues had said in terms,

1 "You may think you can cope but you are not coping" or
 2 "You will not be able to cope", I would have taken that
 3 extremely seriously.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 A. Also, I think if the timing of this email -- did I see
 6 the timing of this email was 9.42 pm?
 7 Q. Pm on the evening of the 15th.
 8 A. I think it is perfectly possible that he had a call with
 9 me after -- I mean, I think, actually, it's implicit in
 10 the email that he had a call with me after I had invoked
 11 London Gold and, you know, Charlie is essentially saying
 12 well done to the others for, you know, mutual agreement
 13 at some call earlier that evening that plainly we
 14 weren't succeeding and London Gold was necessary.
 15 Q. Let's just examine that chronology just a little bit
 16 more --
 17 A. Sure.
 18 Q. -- closely, then, in light of that.
 19 Can we look, please, at {CLG00008314}. This is
 20 an email run from 16 June, and if we go, please, down to
 21 page 2 {CLG00008314/2}, there's an email at the bottom
 22 of page 2 from Charlie Parker to Councillor
 23 Nickie Aiken, copied to others at Westminster, and the
 24 context is the decision that I think had been made for
 25 John Barradell to go in to RBKC as chair of LAP.

1 But if you then go up the chain to Nickie Aiken's
 2 response, she says:
 3 "Only took them two days to decide they can't cope.
 4 We told them first thing on Wednesday that they wouldn't
 5 be able to cope."
 6 Now, do you remember that?
 7 A. No. And I'm sorry to have to volunteer something
 8 disagreeable, but just before the break you showed me
 9 an email that was really someone obsessing about
 10 reputation management. I think reputation management is
 11 very much the theme of these communications, but it is
 12 not my reputation or Kensington and Chelsea's
 13 reputation, it is the reputation of those in this email
 14 chain that we are talking about.
 15 Q. Well, was it a fact -- just to answer the question, if
 16 you wouldn't mind, please -- that either Westminster or
 17 others told you first thing on Wednesday the 14th that
 18 you, RBKC, wouldn't be able to cope?
 19 A. No, it is not a fact. I can imagine how Nickie Aiken
 20 would have come about this impression --
 21 Q. How?
 22 A. -- but it is not a fact.
 23 Q. Right. How would she have come about --
 24 A. It would have come about through reputation management
 25 on the part of others.

1 Q. Why would others be interested in managing their
 2 reputation?
 3 A. Well --
 4 Q. What was the problem?
 5 A. The problem would be that this was a huge tragedy, and
 6 not only would, of course, Kensington and Chelsea come
 7 under intense scrutiny, but also arrangements around
 8 London Gold itself. So I think people would be anxious
 9 as to what role they thought they'd played or perceived
 10 they had played or would want others to perceive they
 11 had played.
 12 Q. Do you remember that Emma Strain was the person in
 13 charge of -- well, she was assistant director of
 14 external affairs at London Councils; do you remember
 15 that?
 16 A. No.
 17 Q. You don't.
 18 Let's just look at a document, {RBK00065051}. This
 19 is her email to you on 15 June, and we've jumped to that
 20 date for reflective purposes. This is where she offers
 21 the assistance to you of additional volunteers for
 22 sorting out donations and help with communications. Do
 23 you remember that?
 24 A. I don't, actually, but I'm sure -- you know, it's plain
 25 there that it should have reached me, yeah.

1 Q. Let's go to {RBK00004229}, because we see in that email
 2 that you forward this email on to Debbie Morris, who at
 3 this stage was RBKC's donations lead during the
 4 response.
 5 A. Yeah.
 6 Q. She's provided a witness statement to the Inquiry at
 7 {RBK00035581} and she explains this at paragraph 23.
 8 But if you look at this document, you say to her:
 9 "Debbie
 10 "I don't think we want cash donations but if people
 11 want to give to the Just Giving or other websites, that
 12 [would] be the fine.
 13 "We don't want physical items.
 14 "Agreed?"
 15 In the light of the pressure, though, that
 16 the council was facing in relation to communications
 17 being completely inundated, why did you think or why did
 18 you not think that using this type of assistance offered
 19 by Emma Strain was helpful?
 20 A. Well, it's the sorting out of donations. I think that
 21 that would have been fine, if that was a sort of
 22 physical -- a contribution of members of staff, and that
 23 would have been up to Debbie to respond to. Just
 24 as Emma Strain says, "Pass me on", I'm passing her on to
 25 actually not just Debbie Morris, but to a number of

1 others there.
 2 What I did not want them to do is to think that they
 3 needed to make cash donations, because the borough was
 4 perfectly capable of meeting the cash needs, not least
 5 with the Bellwin scheme. That wasn't an issue. What
 6 was at issue would be help with physical items, where we
 7 did need help, and that was what Debbie was then engaged
 8 upon. I didn't think there needed to be more physical
 9 items donated because, actually, the public response on
 10 the Wednesday was huge and, you know, wonderful. But
 11 actually it was so huge that it became a task in itself
 12 to corral the donations and organise them in such a way
 13 to be of practical use to the survivors.
 14 Q. But why not adopt the offered help from GLA in order to
 15 send the message out, "We don't want physical items,
 16 please stop sending them in, they're inundating us, if
 17 you want to give, give by Just Giving"? Why not use the
 18 offered assistance?
 19 A. Well, as I say, I think volunteers folded into the
 20 command of the person in charge of corralling the
 21 physical donations was fine, that would have been for
 22 Debbie to take Emma up on that offer, so that's
 23 Team London volunteers.
 24 Then there's a question about donate cash. Well,
 25 not to us, but to independent and charitable routes,

1 that would have been fine.
 2 And then she says, "Is it also please do not donate
 3 any" — yes, well, it was, we don't want more physical
 4 items.
 5 Q. You were also, I think, offered assistance on the
 6 morning of 14 June from central government. Do you
 7 remember that?
 8 A. I think I was. I think it was of a "tell us what you
 9 need" sort of open offer, rather than a specific thing.
 10 Q. Yes.
 11 {RBK00005766}. Email to you from Melanie Dawes, who
 12 was the Permanent Secretary to the DCLG, at 09.07. You
 13 can see it, second email down:
 14 "Dear Nick,
 15 "I just wanted to express how shocked and sad I was
 16 to hear about the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower this
 17 morning.
 18 "We are ready to help however we can from Central
 19 Government — Jo Farrar from DCLG is already leading on
 20 this. Obviously today you will be dealing with the
 21 immediate response but do let us know — as and when it
 22 is helpful — if there is anything we can do."
 23 That was at 9.07, and at 9.09, two minutes later,
 24 you responded to her:
 25 "Many thanks. Plenty of blue light resource

1 at present."
 2 So that was your response.
 3 Did you go back to her or did you think of going
 4 back to her at any later stage, particularly during
 5 14 June, and change your mind and say, "Well, actually,
 6 we would like some help, please, from central
 7 government"?
 8 A. I don't think I did consider doing that. I thought
 9 I knew something about what central government could or
 10 couldn't do, having been a civil servant for some time,
 11 having had contact with DCLG over the years in which I'd
 12 worked in local government, and it was not immediately
 13 obvious to me what central government as such could do
 14 in the immediate aftermath. Plainly there were things
 15 they could do a little bit further down the line,
 16 notably financial, but on that day, I didn't think that
 17 they were a source of specific or practical help.
 18 Q. Very good. Okay.
 19 Did you know that Jo Farrar had tried to contact you
 20 during the 14th but you weren't available to speak to
 21 her?
 22 A. I think we may have missed calls or something like that.
 23 I think I was able to talk to her on the 15th.
 24 Q. I think the upshot of your evidence is that during the
 25 14th and indeed the 15th, your view was that you didn't

1 need any assistance from central government?
 2 A. I didn't see what assistance they could really provide
 3 as central government at that stage in the crisis.
 4 Q. Now, let's then turn to the first Council Gold meeting
 5 that you attended. That was at 11 am on 14 June; yes?
 6 A. Yeah.
 7 Q. And you chaired it; yes?
 8 A. Yeah.
 9 Q. What do you say to those who say that a Gold meeting or
 10 strategic meeting should have been held at an earlier
 11 point in the day?
 12 A. I say that that might have impeded the work that
 13 Laura Johnson and adult social care colleagues and
 14 others were doing briefing staff so that they could get
 15 on up to the scene of the tragedy.
 16 Q. Did you consider having a Gold meeting earlier in the
 17 day but then put it off until 11 o'clock, or was this
 18 the first moment that you —
 19 A. I thought that we were in train trying to get help to
 20 the site, and that that was the priority for people who
 21 would then attend the London Gold meeting — the RBKC
 22 Gold meeting.
 23 Q. And if we go to the meeting notes, {RBK00013271}, we can
 24 see who was in attendance, and we can see, if you go to
 25 page 3 {RBK00013271/3}, that, at the bottom of the page,

1 it says:
 2 "NH reported that a number of other boroughs have
 3 offered their help and we can call upon their resources
 4 and to establish a rota of officers at the rest centre."
 5 Was it the case that at that point — I think it
 6 is — you hadn't accepted any of the offers of the help
 7 from other boroughs?
 8 A. I don't think I'd accepted any specific offer by then.
 9 Q. Right.
 10 A. I think that the two officers from Southwark I obtained
 11 soon after this meeting, yeah, in the chronology.
 12 Q. Now, if we go back a page, please, to page 2
 13 {RBK00013271/2}, you can see that this meeting records,
 14 in the third bullet point down:
 15 "Although there were no Council officers present at
 16 the rest Centres for a long time, they are now there."
 17 Were you satisfied during 14 June, and particularly
 18 at this point in the morning, that there were sufficient
 19 RBKC staff at the scene supporting those affected by the
 20 fire?
 21 A. I was under the impression that there were, but I would
 22 not have said that — I would not have been confident of
 23 them getting there much after — much before 9, maybe
 24 even 10 o'clock.
 25 Q. What led you to be confident that there were?

1 A. Well, again, it's a lack of contraindication. It's
 2 people — as far as I was aware, no one saying, "We have
 3 a desperate problem at such and such, we don't have any
 4 cover".
 5 Q. Did you go out to the rest centres to see for yourself
 6 which RBKC staff were there and what they were doing?
 7 A. No, I didn't. I think it is expected or part of the
 8 protocol of the contingency management plan that the
 9 Gold is pretty proximate to the borough emergency
 10 control centre, not necessarily sort of sitting in the
 11 room, but very contactable, very close by, and after my
 12 visit up to the scene of the disaster early in the
 13 morning, I didn't think I should absent myself again
 14 that day.
 15 Q. What was your assessment that day, perhaps coming into
 16 the afternoon, of the way the rest centres were
 17 operating?
 18 A. I think if you'd asked me exactly that question at the
 19 time, I would have said that I was under the impression
 20 that the voluntary sector had done a very good job in
 21 providing some shelter, some respite, some sustenance
 22 for the survivors, and that we were probably in the
 23 process of trying to whittle down the numbers so that we
 24 had one large facility to look after instead of coming
 25 to deputise at or support a number of them.

1 Q. Now, let's look at {RBK00037123}. This is an email from
 2 Councillor Mills, sent to you and Councillor
 3 Nicholas Paget—Brown and Laura Johnson at 12.59 on
 4 14 June:
 5 "Dear Officers, I have spent time there this morning
 6 and will go back now."
 7 She gives her telephone number:
 8 "The Trust wanted to know if you can send an officer
 9 too help liaise with the different agencies and act as
 10 a coordinating voice.
 11 "Most grateful if you can. Do let me know if I can
 12 assist also and of course my mobile will be on alert."
 13 Was it the position that there was an absence of
 14 RBKC leadership at the rest centres that were operating?
 15 A. I think it must be so, yeah.
 16 Q. Why?
 17 A. I think for a little while at least we were depending on
 18 the people who had very kindly opened them up and were
 19 running them, but I think that we were trying also to
 20 find people who would go and take over from them as soon
 21 as we could.
 22 Q. And that was still happening, was it, by 1 pm?
 23 A. I'm a bit surprised that it's still happening then.
 24 Q. Right.
 25 A. It is just possible that Councillor Mills thought that

1 there was, as it were, someone in addition to whoever
 2 might also have been there doing something specific for
 3 anyone taking shelter at that rest centre.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 Let's go to {RBK00037309}, next. This is an email
 6 from Rock Feilding—Mellen on 14 June at 14.42 to you,
 7 "Re: Westway":
 8 "We are getting more messages about Westway Sports
 9 Centre being in chaos.
 10 "Who is going to manage it and when will S/he get
 11 there?
 12 "Maybe let Angela McConville know, so she can give
 13 name of their manager there?"
 14 Were you concerned that there were reports of, as he
 15 calls it, chaos at the Westway?
 16 A. Yes, I'm sure, yes. That's a very strong word to use.
 17 Q. Well, did you seek to understand what was going on there
 18 and why it was in chaos?
 19 A. Well, I can't honestly remember what I did, but
 20 I suppose I would have inferred that there were a lot of
 21 people in need of help and it not being clear who to go
 22 to, or the people who were there helping were in short
 23 supply compared to those needing help.
 24 Q. What did you do in response to this message?
 25 A. I think we — I checked that there were people who could

1 be sent up there to help. I can't imagine what else
 2 I would have done.
 3 Q. Who would you have checked with, or who did you check
 4 with?
 5 A. I don't know. I mean, I might have started with Laura
 6 and gone on to social care colleagues.
 7 Q. Right. But Laura was housing.
 8 A. Yes, indeed. But there would have been — I would have
 9 thought there would have been housing officers there
 10 undertaking their role, so she might have had
 11 a perspective on what else was needed.
 12 Q. Had you thought at this —
 13 A. I don't know the answer to that question, let me be
 14 clear. I'm guessing.
 15 Q. Let's go next to {RBK00013272}. What I'm showing you
 16 next here are the minutes of the RBKC Gold meeting that
 17 happened at 3 o'clock on 14 June. You are present, and
 18 you can see who else was present, Robert Black also
 19 present.
 20 If we go, please, to page 2 {RBK00013272/2}, where
 21 you see in the second bullet point down under "Issues &
 22 actions [arising] from the meeting", it says:
 23 "We were short of senior managers at the
 24 rest centres. The Board was invited to submit a list of
 25 volunteers, with Corporate Cards, to TR who could help

1 manage to keep the centres open supporting the
 2 specialists until the people have been cleared."
 3 TR, I think, is Tony Redpath.
 4 A. Correct.
 5 Q. Would you accept that that was a constant problem on
 6 14 June and one which continued until the next day?
 7 A. Yes, I would.
 8 Q. Why was there a shortage of senior managers at the
 9 rest centres?
 10 A. Well, I think we had probably misjudged the extent to
 11 which we needed to be present there in significant
 12 numbers, compared to the possibility that a smaller
 13 number of people with the help of those running the
 14 Westway Sports Centre itself might have been sufficient.
 15 Q. You say you may have misjudged; was it a misjudgement on
 16 the day about deployment of available people, or was it
 17 an historic misjudgement about preparation?
 18 A. Probably both.
 19 Q. Certainly the second would include the first .
 20 A. Yeah.
 21 Q. Yes, I see.
 22 Was that a reflection of the fact that RBKC, in
 23 fact, structurally and in resource terms, couldn't cope
 24 with the scale of this incident?
 25 A. I think -- well, it was becoming clear. It was not

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1 clear enough to me on the day. On that Wednesday, we
 2 were in continuous sort of call and response mode,
 3 I would say. We were seeking to do better. We knew
 4 certain things we had to do; other things then needed to
 5 be added to that list, and I think that that forms part
 6 of the cycle of action and reaction over the course of
 7 that day.
 8 Q. Did this message from Rock Feilding--Mellen that the
 9 Westway was in chaos not prompt you to reconsider
 10 whether or not you should be seeking external mutual aid
 11 or, indeed, triggering the LLAG Gold arrangements?
 12 A. I think I thought it was a problem that could be solved
 13 within our capacity, rather than escalating.
 14 Q. Why did you think that?
 15 A. Because there were significant parts of the council who
 16 were not completely under the cosh already and to whom
 17 I could turn for further support. So Debbie Morris
 18 looking after the donations was one example, I think
 19 Sue Harris took on creating a rota that would help with
 20 the Westway Sports Centre, and it was a case of
 21 absorbing tasks across the breadth of the council.
 22 Q. Did you discuss that very question with David Kerry or
 23 Stuart Priestley or Tony Redpath at the time, so
 24 mid-afternoon?
 25 A. I don't remember a specific conversation on that.

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1 Q. Right.
 2 Let's then go next to {GOL00000159}, which is
 3 an email at 14.26 on 14 June, second email down, from
 4 John Hetherington to Chris Naylor, the on-duty LLAG, and
 5 this provides a general update on the situation.
 6 There's a response from Chris Naylor at the top of
 7 the string, into which you are copied, as well as
 8 John Barradell at this point, and the response is simply
 9 a thank you.
 10 But if we look down at the substance, in the third
 11 paragraph it says, can you see, third line down from the
 12 start of that paragraph:
 13 "Cordons remain in place ..."
 14 Can you see that?
 15 A. Erm ...
 16 Q. Third paragraph:
 17 "There are 6 confirmed fatalities ..."
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. "Cordons remain in place ..."
 20 And then it says:
 21 "RBKC have opened a number of reception centres and
 22 a friends and family centre for this looking for people
 23 involved in the incident. They have support from LBHF
 24 for the reception centres and have received supportive
 25 offers from a number of boroughs. At present they are

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1 managing within demands and assessing the exact need for
 2 support.
 3 "There is a Cross Whitehall meeting at 16.00 which
 4 Nicholas will be on the call to represent local
 5 government. The focus at present for RBKC is sorting
 6 the practical and accommodation needs for those affected
 7 by the incident."
 8 Was that an accurate summary of the position as it
 9 stood at the time as you saw it?
 10 A. Well, I think the last sentence is correct. I think
 11 that, given what we've just seen, to say RBKC have
 12 opened a number of reception centres is not right,
 13 because the voluntary sector opened reception centres
 14 for the most part. I mean, you can -- I think Westway
 15 might be different.
 16 "At present they are managing within demands"; well,
 17 we were in the process of trying to ensure that we were,
 18 so I think that is probably too optimistic, but we were
 19 trying to assess the exact need for support, certainly .
 20 Q. Right.
 21 A. So it's not perfect.
 22 Q. Right. So you were intending to manage within demands,
 23 thought you were, but in fact weren't?
 24 A. I think that's fair enough.
 25 Q. Right.

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1 Then let's turn to the first ministerial meeting,
 2 cross—Whitehall. As it says in this email, there was to
 3 be one at 1600 hours.
 4 Was it the case that you received the invitation for
 5 that meeting but, due to an administrative error not of
 6 your making, you were unable to join the call?
 7 A. I'm pretty certain I didn't join it. The reason for not
 8 joining it, you know, would not come naturally to mind.
 9 Q. Right. There are records within the Inquiry's
 10 disclosure that would show that.
 11 A. Okay.
 12 Q. But you don't know anything about the reason, but you
 13 didn't join it.
 14 You saw that it was going to happen, though, from
 15 the email that you got or were copied in to from
 16 Chris Naylor to John Hetherington. Did you follow that
 17 up and seek to join the cross—Whitehall meeting?
 18 A. I don't remember. There are quite a few meetings, and
 19 I'm not sure when the strategic co—ordinating group
 20 meeting was at that time. I think my own Council Gold
 21 meeting had finished before it, but I'm not sure about
 22 the — I think the SCG might have been 5.30, so it
 23 should have been possible.
 24 Q. Yes. Were you asked to provide any information to the
 25 cross—Whitehall meeting before it happened?

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1 A. I don't remember doing so, and I would have been very
 2 surprised if I wouldn't have written an email to that
 3 effect if I had been asked to do so.
 4 Q. Right.
 5 Let's go to {CAB00002714}, minutes of that meeting.
 6 There it is: "Ministerial meeting: Grenfell Tower fire.
 7 14 June 2017".
 8 Now, we don't have a record of your receiving these
 9 minutes after the meeting, either in an email or in the
 10 documents in your possession. Do you remember seeing
 11 these minutes after the meeting at all?
 12 A. I'm pretty certain I wouldn't have seen them.
 13 Q. Not, right.
 14 Let's go to page 1, b) at the bottom:
 15 "Immediate shelter and medium term rehousing."
 16 That was listed as a key issue.
 17 Then underneath that it says:
 18 "The local Council were presently identifying
 19 temporary accommodation for those residents of
 20 Grenfell Tower. Longer—term re—housing would also be
 21 the responsibility of the Council. The Council were not
 22 currently asking for additional support."
 23 I think from your evidence this morning, that
 24 correctly summarised the position, didn't it?
 25 A. Yes, I think that's a fair enough as a summary, yeah.

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1 Q. Were you contacted after the meeting about why you
 2 weren't there or to be the recipient of an update, do
 3 you remember?
 4 A. No, I don't recall that.
 5 Q. Right.
 6 Let's move on in the day, then, to the meeting with
 7 John Barradell at 5.30, 17.30, on that day, 14 June.
 8 Let's go, please, to {GOL00000155}. We can see the
 9 invitation and the agenda for that meeting. At it were
 10 to be you, Chris Naylor, John Barradell, John O'Brien,
 11 John Hetherington and Mark Sawyer, and the agenda items:
 12 "▪ Significant changes to the situation overview and
 13 pan London coordination structures in place
 14 (John Hetherington/Nicholas Holgate)
 15 "▪ Immediate and longer term support requirements
 16 for RBK&C (Nicholas Holgate).
 17 "▪ Wider London implications (All).
 18 "It is anticipated to take approximately 15 mins for
 19 the call."
 20 That was sent at 16.10; yes?
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. And you, as you can see, got that invitation.
 23 Now, what was your understanding — well, let me ask
 24 you this way: if you look at the text, it says:
 25 "A teleconference has been organised for 17.30 ...

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1 The purpose of the call is to understand the likely
 2 support RBK&C will require and how this can be best
 3 supported across local government and in particular
 4 strategic support to Nicholas. Secondly to consider the
 5 wider implications for RBK&C and London, and what
 6 initial actions are required."
 7 Was it you who prompted that call and the purpose of
 8 that meeting?
 9 A. I don't think so.
 10 Q. So was it thrust upon you, essentially?
 11 A. Well, very welcome. I think it was a very welcome
 12 initiative on London Resilience's part.
 13 Q. Right. Was it your view at the time that the call had
 14 no purpose because you didn't need support?
 15 A. No. No. I thought that the value of the call, in
 16 addition to anything that other copy recipients thought
 17 they would get from it, the value of the call would be
 18 for me to give an account and for others on the call to
 19 say, "Have you thought of X?", or, "What you've said on
 20 Y is either reassuring, not reassuring", and so on. It
 21 was a way of people who had thought more deeply about
 22 emergency planning than I had to hold me to account, in
 23 a kindly fashion but nevertheless an effective fashion.
 24 Q. That's not how it comes across, though, is it, in
 25 John Hetherington's text of what he says in the email?

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1 A. No. Well, I mean, what he says is absolutely fine as
 2 far as it goes, but I think that the subtext was: are
 3 you managing, and do you need to invoke London Gold or
 4 not?
 5 Q. Did it occur to you at the time to ask yourself the
 6 question: "Well, why are they asking me that? I'm
 7 managing fine"?

8 A. I would not have taken so presumptuous an attitude.
 9 I think, having talked to Eleanor Kelly earlier in the
 10 day, and also having seen some of the toing and froing
 11 and the efforts we were making to try and bring help,
 12 there was room for doubt, there was room for not knowing
 13 as much as I could have done, and sharing where
 14 I thought we were with this particular set of copy
 15 recipients was as good a way of stress testing what we
 16 were then doing as I could find.

17 Q. Is it fair to say that by this stage, teatime on
 18 14 June, you were beginning to have doubts about your
 19 confidence in the ability of RBKC to cope on its own
 20 without external help?

21 A. I think I was probably still thinking that we were in
 22 the throes of a response and that we were making some
 23 progress. I mean, I took some comfort at both Gold
 24 meetings from what appeared to be and what I think was
 25 actually some good progress on the part of the housing

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1 department, which Laura Johnson sets out in her
 2 statement, for example.
 3 So, you know, I knew that I did not know, but I did
 4 not know how far we were falling short, and having
 5 an interlocutor who was independent of the efforts that
 6 the council was making, but who had given thought and
 7 had the professional — relevant professional background
 8 was a very good way of trying to either affirm or refute
 9 that we were doing enough in the right way.

10 Q. Now, according to John Barradell's Inquiry witness
 11 statement number 1 at paragraph 31 {GOL00000244/9}, he
 12 refers to "various issues facing RBKC" that were the
 13 subject of what he says there was "extensive discussion"
 14 on the call.
 15 Can you help us with what those were?
 16 Do you agree, first of all, there was extensive
 17 discussion of various issues?

18 A. Well, "extensive" implies that it went on for quite
 19 a long time. I think I'd be surprised if it lasted as
 20 short a time as 15 minutes, but I'm not sure it went on
 21 a very long time.
 22 What I do recall is John Hetherington's account of
 23 that telephone meeting, and I think I remember thinking
 24 that that was a perfectly reasonable account of it when
 25 I saw it.

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1 Q. I see.
 2 Do you remember whether questions were asked about
 3 the sufficiency of resources in relation to temporary
 4 housing or social workers, or communications, or
 5 community cohesion and things of that nature?
 6 A. I don't remember the specifics of the call, I'm afraid.
 7 I think John's account is all that I would sort of
 8 recollect at one remove.
 9 Q. Right. Let's look at that and see if what I'm putting
 10 to you is what you're referring to by his account.
 11 {GOL00000181}. This is an email of 18.59 at the
 12 14 June from John Hetherington to you, Chris Naylor,
 13 John Barradell, Mark Sawyer and John O'Brien:
 14 "Good evening,
 15 "A short precis of the earlier Teleconference."
 16 You can see what's then set out underneath that.

17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Is this what you're referring to?
 19 A. Yes, it is, I think so.
 20 Q. So you have read this recently, have you?
 21 A. A few days ago, probably.
 22 Q. Right. But, having refreshed your memory from it, you
 23 don't have any quarrel with its accuracy as an account
 24 of the —
 25 A. No, I think I thought at the time it was accurate and

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1 I've no reason to change my tune on that.
 2 Q. Right.
 3 Do you know why a full minute wasn't taken of the
 4 meeting?
 5 A. Well, I mean, that may just be people trying to convey
 6 the substance of a meeting in a — you know, under
 7 considerable time pressure, making sure that the
 8 headlines are circulated as quickly as they can.
 9 Q. Now, John O'Brien has provided a witness statement to
 10 the Inquiry. Let's just look at that, please. It's
 11 {LOC00000004/3}. I would like to look with you, please,
 12 at paragraph 7. This is about this meeting, and he
 13 refers to the 18.59 note we've just looked at, which he
 14 exhibits, and he said:
 15 "The note does not record Eleanor Kelly as being
 16 present on this call and I do not recall her being so.
 17 During the call, I said to Nicholas Holgate that if
 18 the Council's political leadership thought it would be
 19 helpful at any point to have a conversation with other
 20 borough Leaders I would be happy to see if I could
 21 facilitate that. My recollection is that on the call
 22 Nicholas Holgate related the response actions being
 23 taken by the Council to that point in time, working with
 24 other partners, and answered some questions on that from
 25 other participants on the call."

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1 Just pausing there, is that right?
 2 A. That seems right to me.
 3 Q. "Participants asked Nicholas Holgate to consider
 4 further, specific assistance that the Council may
 5 require from other boroughs."
 6 Is that right?
 7 A. I think it's very likely they would have said such
 8 a thing. I've no difficulty with that.
 9 Q. Right. Then:
 10 "Nicholas Holgate acknowledged the many offers of
 11 mutual aid that had already been made and welcomed.
 12 Further steps, including the invitation to receive
 13 further, experienced officers the next day, were agreed
 14 as detailed in the note ..."
 15 Do you agree with both of those?
 16 A. I think that's right.
 17 Q. Right, thank you.
 18 If we go back to the précis of the meeting, please,
 19 at {GOL0000181}, which you have accepted, it says under
 20 "Immediate and longer term support":
 21 "LB Southwark will send two senior officers with
 22 recent experience and longer term experience of recovery
 23 following the London Bridge and Lakanal House
 24 incidents."
 25 Four lines underneath that:

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1 "City of London have offered Communications Team
 2 support to RBKC, this will be arranged direct between
 3 the two comms teams.
 4 "London Resilience will work with RBKC to ensure the
 5 right support to Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery
 6 Going forward ..."
 7 You have accepted the accuracy of that as a subject
 8 of discussion. Was there any support offered that you
 9 didn't accept, any specific support?
 10 A. I don't think so.
 11 Q. Did anyone advise you that the incident was too big for
 12 one local authority to deal with?
 13 A. No.
 14 Q. Was activation of the London Gold resolution discussed
 15 by anyone on that call?
 16 A. I don't think it was explicitly discussed, but I do
 17 think it lurked underneath the conversation, and I think
 18 that -- I mean, if I had either changed my mind by then
 19 or if the answers to the questions had been
 20 insufficiently encouraging, then I think I would have
 21 expected and they would have been well within their
 22 rights to say, "We think you should invoke London Gold".
 23 Q. You say it lurked under the surface; was that purely
 24 because of the identity of those on the call,
 25 Chris Naylor being the on-duty LLAG, John Barradell,

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1 John O'Brien and Mark Sawyer?
 2 A. I think that it was an obvious choice, and they were
 3 right, absolutely right, to seek to explore whether the
 4 choice should be made.
 5 Q. You say in your statement at paragraph 32 at page 6
 6 {RBK00035426/6} -- there is no need to go to it -- that
 7 at that stage no one seemed to envisage an escalation in
 8 the response of local government; is that correct?
 9 A. That is correct.
 10 Q. I think you say you could have escalated your response
 11 and asked colleagues from other boroughs to take charge
 12 on behalf of London boroughs as a whole, but essentially
 13 you chose not to do so --
 14 A. Correct.
 15 Q. -- at that stage.
 16 A. Correct.
 17 Q. Was that because you thought that the two colleagues
 18 coming from Southwark and the offer of the comms team
 19 was enough?
 20 A. Well, and Mark Sawyer, and people from Hammersmith
 21 helping at the reception centre or the BECC or both, and
 22 other arrangements of which I might not have been aware,
 23 and which management colleagues were completely at
 24 liberty to adopt.
 25 So, again, it was absolutely not a case of RBKC

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1 managing all on its own, but trying to fill out where
 2 they needed to do so.
 3 Q. Did you have any further telephone conversation with
 4 John Barradell that evening?
 5 A. I don't believe so.
 6 Q. Now, I just want to look at two other limbs of support
 7 and the circumstances in which they were provided.
 8 First, John Barradell tells us in his first witness
 9 statement to the Inquiry {GOL00000244/9} that it was
 10 agreed during this call, the 17.30 call on 14 June, that
 11 he and Eleanor Kelly, who was, as we know, from
 12 Southwark, would provide support or peer support to you.
 13 That doesn't appear to have been mentioned in the
 14 post-meeting précis, other than that Southwark would
 15 send two officers. Is that right?
 16 A. I don't -- well, what he might be referring to is that
 17 I think, either implicitly or explicitly, it was agreed
 18 that there would be a very similar phone call on
 19 Thursday, and that essentially, again by implication,
 20 there would be tabs kept with sufficient frequency to be
 21 able to react if the situation appeared to have changed,
 22 and I was entirely in accord and welcomed that.
 23 Q. How would the peer support be given, if it was offered,
 24 did you understand at the time?
 25 A. Well, I think the phone call and, as it were, the

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1 searching conversation taking place on that phone call
 2 would probably tell Eleanor and John whether there was
 3 a problem that required me to be persuaded to invoke
 4 London Gold.
 5 Q. What peer support was provided to you, if any, during
 6 the period between this call at 5.30 and the evening of
 7 the 14th, and the activation of the Gold resolution on
 8 16 June?
 9 A. Well, first of all, I would say that the London Gold was
 10 activated on the evening of 15 June.
 11 Q. All right.
 12 A. But that's, you know, another matter.
 13 I think that what I could have done, and I'm sure
 14 what I should have done, is what I did do the following
 15 week, which was to invite an experienced local authority
 16 chief executive colleague to come and, as it were, be in
 17 the room at all times and help me to do the role that
 18 I was then assigned to do, and Barry Quirk, who
 19 of course took over from me, turned up on I think either
 20 the Monday or the Tuesday of the following week.
 21 I could have done such a thing the previous week, and
 22 that would have probably helped.
 23 Q. The second limb of support relates to what I think is
 24 called the after-call note, which was that Mark Sawyer
 25 would liaise with RBKC to detail the support and provide

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1 initial support on structures, needs and experience of
 2 previous events.
 3 Were those discussed afterwards?
 4 A. Well, it says he would discuss with RBKC tomorrow
 5 morning, and --
 6 Q. Yes, did he?
 7 A. Yes, he came to the council, and I wouldn't be able to
 8 recount individual conversations to you, but he was
 9 invaluable on the Thursday.
 10 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 11 Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?
 12 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Yes, I think it is. Thank you very
 13 much.
 14 Well, Mr Holgate, it's time we all had a break to
 15 get some lunch. So we will stop there and resume,
 16 please, at 2 o'clock.
 17 As before, please don't talk to anyone about your
 18 evidence while you're out of the room. All right?
 19 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 20 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much. Would you care
 21 to go with the usher, please. Thank you.
 22 (Pause)
 23 Thank you very much, Mr Millett. 2 o'clock, then,
 24 please.
 25 MR MILLETT: Thank you.

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1 (1.00 pm)
 2 (The short adjournment)
 3 (2.00 pm)
 4 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right, Mr Holgate, ready to carry
 5 on, I hope?
 6 THE WITNESS: Yes, thank you.
 7 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Thank you very much.
 8 Yes, Mr Millett.
 9 MR MILLETT: Thank you, Mr Chairman.
 10 Mr Holgate, can I take you back, please, to
 11 {GOL00000181}.
 12 (Pause)
 13 A. Yes. I can see paragraphs 31 to 33.
 14 Q. That's not the document we want.
 15 A. I beg your pardon.
 16 Q. {GOL00000181}, please. Yes, that's the one.
 17 Now, this is the email from John Hetherington to you
 18 at 18.59 on 14 June, we looked at it earlier.
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. You said you had seen this and there wasn't anything
 21 which you would quarrel with, and it reflects your
 22 recollect as best you have it.
 23 Can I take you, please, to the heading, "Immediate
 24 and longer term support", and look under that at the
 25 third line, which says this:

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1 "If requested by the Leader of RBKC, London Councils
 2 may make an approach to political leaders across London
 3 to provide political support to RBKC but it was
 4 recognised this is a small network of people able to act
 5 in this capacity and a delicate subject."
 6 Who said that?
 7 A. Well, I don't know, but the active parties in the
 8 sentence appear to be the leader of RBKC and
 9 London Councils.
 10 Q. Right. What was meant, so far as you recollect it and
 11 understood it, by an approach to political leaders to
 12 provide political support to RBKC?
 13 A. I think what it might have meant was that if
 14 Councillor Paget-Brown felt extremely beleaguered and,
 15 you know, completely on his own, then just possibly
 16 another council leader could say something like, "Please
 17 give Kensington and Chelsea a chance to do its job", or
 18 something like that.
 19 Q. What was it at that time -- so early in the evening of
 20 14 June 2017 -- that led people on this call to think
 21 that RBKC needed what is called political support?
 22 A. Well, it may have been that commentary was beginning to
 23 turn. So this isn't contemporaneous, but, I mean, the
 24 next -- I think it was at the next Gold meeting that the
 25 head of media and communications said that conversation

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1 was turning to cause and blame, and it may be that there
 2 was an intimation of that even by the Wednesday evening.
 3 Q. Cause and blame of?
 4 A. Of the fire, either the responsibility for the fire in
 5 the first place, let alone addressing the aftermath.
 6 Q. Right. Was that -- well, will you help me: what was the
 7 delicate subject?
 8 A. Well, that there was a crisis and potentially a huge
 9 number of people who'd lost their lives.
 10 Q. Was the delicate subject the handling of the aftermath
 11 of the fire or the causes?
 12 A. I'd have thought both, and the fact of it. The fact of
 13 it immediately gives rise to a question as to who is
 14 responsible and can we, you know, in an age of media
 15 frenzy, immediately identify and pillory the culprits,
 16 and actually it was a lot harder, as all your
 17 painstaking work has indicated, it is somewhat harder,
 18 and there are many more people involved in
 19 an explanation of the fire than might have appeared at
 20 the time.
 21 Q. Now, this is at just before 7 pm on the 14th. Do you
 22 recall that at 7.30 pm there was a strategic
 23 co-ordination group meeting, the fifth of that day?
 24 A. I don't spontaneously recollect it, no.
 25 Q. I think, in fact, you weren't in attendance at that,

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1 according to the records, and that RBKC was represented
 2 by Tony Redpath, David Kerry and Rebecca Blackburn.
 3 A. Okay.
 4 Q. Did Mr Kerry update you about what transpired at that
 5 meeting?
 6 A. I don't remember him doing so.
 7 Q. Were you aware that concerns were expressed about the
 8 lack of accurate details about the numbers of those
 9 affected?
 10 A. Again, I don't recall that, but I think that would --
 11 I mean, that would have been a perfectly valid comment,
 12 and I think it would have been something that would not
 13 have completely surprised me.
 14 Q. Do you remember being told by Mr Kerry by way of update
 15 that the police had asked that RBKC improve their
 16 messaging?
 17 A. Again, that doesn't ring a bell, but it is perfectly
 18 possible that he did do.
 19 Q. Did he tell you that there was an action point, which
 20 one can see in the minute, which I don't need to show
 21 you --
 22 A. Right.
 23 Q. -- at {LFB00119322/4}, which said:
 24 "Future communications to provide clarity of
 25 messaging to partners and the public what is provided by

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1 the authority at various reception centres."
 2 A. Yeah.
 3 Q. Did he update you on that?
 4 A. I don't remember that, but I think it would -- I mean,
 5 I don't dispute at all that it would have been
 6 a perfectly valid point for somebody to make.
 7 Q. Now, at that meeting there was also discussion of
 8 putting plans in place overnight for recovery and
 9 humanitarian assistance.
 10 Now, we know from Sue Redmond's evidence that she
 11 was appointed to the role of HALO to lead the HASG, the
 12 humanitarian assistance steering group, on 15 June, the
 13 next day; yes?
 14 A. I think that's right.
 15 Q. And you I think accepted earlier when I asked you that
 16 she had a pivotal role.
 17 Was there any reason why you didn't officially
 18 appoint the HALO on 14 June and ensure that the
 19 humanitarian assistance steering group was established
 20 on that day?
 21 A. It may have been the case that I was worried about the
 22 burdens that that would entail, and that I was
 23 reflecting on whether there was someone who could lead
 24 that work within the council's purview.
 25 Q. Was there?

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1 A. Well, I think although Sue was an interim executive
 2 director, and although she was new, actually she was
 3 a very experienced senior social worker, and I think she
 4 could and in practice did do a lot towards making that
 5 role a reality.
 6 Q. Right.
 7 Did you tell her that she would find out the
 8 following day if she was to be HALO or not?
 9 A. I think there was an email to that effect, but -- yeah.
 10 Q. Right. Was there a lack of clarity in your mind as to
 11 who was to be the HALO?
 12 A. I think I was quite keen that it would be her, but I was
 13 worried about whether it was asking too much.
 14 Q. Did you discuss that worry with anybody internally at
 15 RBKC?
 16 A. I don't remember doing so.
 17 Q. Or anyone at London Resilience, given that they were now
 18 involved?
 19 A. No, I don't remember doing so.
 20 Q. Right. Why is that? Why didn't you?
 21 A. I think -- I suppose I thought that it was my
 22 responsibility.
 23 Q. Right, it may have been, but why not discuss how you
 24 were to discharge that responsibility with somebody who
 25 was perhaps a little bit more expert in the field?

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1 A. Yes. Well, I agree, I think that would have been a very
2 sensible course of action.
3 Q. Why didn't you?
4 A. It didn't occur to me to do so. I thought I had to take
5 responsibility .
6 Q. Yes.
7 Can we go to Sue Redmond's statement, please, her
8 second statement at {RBK00058120/5}, and on page 5 we
9 can see at paragraph 7.3 she says:
10 "Whilst preparing for the first HASG meeting, I was
11 informed by Nicholas Holgate that an expert from
12 London Councils may be joining us on 15 June 2017 and
13 that he may take the role of HALO."
14 Do you recall telling Sue Redmond that?
15 A. I don't, but I may have been thinking of Mark Sawyer at
16 the time.
17 Q. Right, thank you.
18 Were you aware that Sue Redmond was not in fact
19 trained on RBKC's contingency management plan?
20 A. I think I'd have been implicitly conscious of that,
21 given that she had been in post for quite a short time.
22 Q. Was it a deliberate decision by you to wait until
23 15 June to --
24 A. No.
25 Q. Right. So what caused you to make the decision when you

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1 did as opposed to earlier?
2 A. I think perhaps the need to press on and have someone do
3 it, or at least begin to do it, pending an even more
4 qualified person turning up.
5 Q. Do you accept now that that appointment should have been
6 made earlier and --
7 A. Yes, I do.
8 Q. -- that valuable time in that respect was lost?
9 A. I absolutely accept that.
10 Q. Now, let's get to the end, then, of 14 June.
11 In your statement at paragraph 34, page 7
12 {RBK00035426/7}, if we can go to that, please, you say:
13 "Overall, I believed then that the Borough had
14 initiated the right arrangements and that officers were
15 focusing on the right priorities . I now know that
16 around 340 RBKC staff were mobilised on 14 June."
17 Was it your view at the end of that day that council
18 officers were managing the response well, or at least
19 sufficiently well?
20 A. I think I would go for sufficiently .
21 Q. Sufficiently , but I think that's a view you now recant?
22 A. I would say so. I mean, not at least because of what
23 we've just said about the HALO.
24 Q. Thank you.
25 Let's then turn to 15 June 2017, and I want to start

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1 with the operational response. Stick with page 7 and
2 look at the heading "15 June", paragraph 35:
3 "Thursday, 15 June was effectively a continuation of
4 the efforts and plans put in place the day before. Two
5 further Gold meetings took place during 15th June and
6 I produce a copy of the Gold Meeting actions sheets from
7 these meetings as Exhibits NH/20 and NH/21."
8 Now, you attended the Westway Sports Centre at
9 6 o'clock that morning, didn't you, I think?
10 A. I did.
11 Q. And you say in your statement, in the next paragraph:
12 "It appeared to me that it was functioning well."
13 That's paragraph 36; yes?
14 A. Yes.
15 Q. "(It was then that I learned that about 25 people had
16 stayed the night there.)"
17 What was it that led you to form the view that it
18 was functioning well?
19 A. Well, I talked both with the two officers who had stayed
20 overnight and also the representative of the Red Cross,
21 and I could see what I thought was a reasonably orderly
22 layout. In particular , I could see that someone had
23 taken quite a lot of trouble to stack up in an orderly
24 fashion a fraction of the many donations that we'd
25 received, and I took some comfort from the fact that not

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1 a huge number of people had stayed overnight, but some
2 people had stayed over -- some survivors had stayed
3 overnight.
4 Q. But, nonetheless, I think your view of the scale of the
5 incident and the needs that could be furnished by RBKC
6 had not changed from the previous day?
7 A. I think that's right.
8 Q. Yes.
9 Just out of interest , what at that stage, early in
10 the morning of the 15th, did you think the status was in
11 terms of the LRP framework and the protocols that
12 Westway had at that stage? What kind of centre was it,
13 did you think?
14 A. Primarily a rest centre. Primarily a place where
15 survivors could go for support.
16 Q. Well, those are not the same thing, are they?
17 A. Well, there were -- there was scope for people to sleep
18 there, but there was also scope for people to go there
19 and meet council officers and collect goods if they were
20 helpful to them. So I think it is -- it had been
21 a rest centre overnight. If it had to, it could have
22 been a rest centre again, and I think indeed there were
23 a handful of people, for very strong reasons, who wanted
24 to stay in that location or very nearby. But in other
25 respects it was the centre through which council

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1 officers could meet survivors if they needed to, to help
 2 them.
 3 Q. Now, what communications strategy was in place from the
 4 14th into the morning of the 15th about providing the
 5 community with updates on the relief effort?
 6 A. Well, I had hoped that this would have been a product of
 7 the fact that the council was working with itself across
 8 the functions and that managers across the council knew
 9 whom to contact for any given support. So I had thought
 10 that messages would go through the officers, in
 11 particular, attending rest centres or any other places
 12 where they could meet survivors, and that that would be
 13 reflected, for instance, on the council website and
 14 other messages released to the media.
 15 Q. Can we go to {RBK00005409}. Halfway down the first
 16 page, email from Warwick Lightfoot,
 17 Councillor Lightfoot, to you and Nicholas Paget—Brown,
 18 subject, "The Council's need to co—ordinate in
 19 North Kensington".
 20 If you look a little bit further down, if you go,
 21 please, to page 2 of the email run {RBK00005409/2}, at
 22 the top of the page, it says.
 23 "There remains a serious challenge in the
 24 co—ordination between the Council and the Police around
 25 the issue of who is dead, missing and who is in hospital

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1 and the Council not being able to offer guidance, which
 2 as I understand it is very much a matter for the
 3 police ...
 4 "I think the Council has to be much more visible.
 5 Moreover that visibility will be needed in the days and
 6 weeks ahead. The full focus of the Council has to
 7 remain on this matter and it must take priority over all
 8 other work we need to be doing. I am not yet persuaded
 9 we are fully on top of the position. Can I assure that
 10 I was hugely impressed by Council staff, the generosity
 11 of our public and the police and fire officers."
 12 Did you consider at the time that you got this
 13 email, which I have not told you, but was at 08.21 in
 14 the morning, that those were valid comments and
 15 concerns?
 16 A. I think they are valid comments and concerns. Yeah.
 17 Q. Right.
 18 If we go to your response at the top of page 1
 19 {RBK00005409/1}, we can see you say there at 9.17,
 20 an hour or so later:
 21 "Thank you. We are clear where people need to go:
 22 Westway Sports Centre. That has been on the news too."
 23 Then in the last paragraph you say:
 24 "We are visible at Westway and although this is not
 25 yet certain, we plan to visit every one given shelter in

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1 a hotel in the course of the day to address as many of
 2 their needs as we can manage."
 3 Was it the case that the ability to receive support
 4 from the council was dependent on the affected person
 5 making themselves known at the Westway?
 6 A. Well, for those that had obtained accommodation the
 7 previous day, I think, as I say there, we were hoping to
 8 be able to see them in their — you know, in or related
 9 to their accommodation.
 10 Q. I mean, you would agree that communication about what
 11 support was available out there into the community was
 12 critical; yes?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Yes. Do you recall, as indicated in these emails,
 15 speaking with Councillor Weale, as we saw earlier, on
 16 the evening of 14 June about preparing leaflets and
 17 posters?
 18 A. Yeah.
 19 Q. Yes. What was done about that, do you know?
 20 A. I don't.
 21 Q. Is it right that a draft leaflet was created by a number
 22 of councillors under their own steam?
 23 A. That may be so.
 24 Q. Let's look at {RBK00038615}. Email to you from
 25 Mary Weale at 18.46 on 15 June, so it's the evening of

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1 that —
 2 A. Yeah.
 3 Q. — day. She suggests to you distributing:
 4 " ... in printed form to the centres that have been
 5 operating, even if they are no longer official, and put
 6 up and handed out and emailed to councillors, the front
 7 desk, other vol orgs etc as soon as possible."
 8 Now, that leaflet wasn't distributed, was it?
 9 A. I don't recall it being so, no.
 10 Q. Do you recall that one of the co—authors,
 11 Councillor Faulks, emailed you again the next day?
 12 Let's look at that, {RBK00003124/3}, bottom of the
 13 thread. There it is:
 14 "Dear all,
 15 "I have repeatedly said to Mr Redpath and others
 16 that we need to communicate more with communities. The
 17 councillors preparing a leaflet that I wanted to get out
 18 last night, but there was still no sign of it today.
 19 "I have become the focus now for discontent saying
 20 that we are not listening. Please can you advise me as
 21 soon as you can tomorrow am what and how we can handle
 22 this situation. We have been far too late to reach out
 23 — but not for want of us councillors asking for help and
 24 advice to do so. We are the front line and are having
 25 to take all the blame for this. We really need help and

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1 support please.
 2 "Please see email below as an example of what I am
 3 receiving."
 4 There's quite a detailed email on page 4
 5 {RBK00003124/4}, which sets out some of the matters in
 6 respect of which the community was expressing
 7 discontent, matters like wristbands, tagging, housing
 8 arrangements, burial procedures for Muslim groups or
 9 from Muslim groups as a concern, et cetera.
 10 Do you recall that?
 11 A. I don't -- I recall, I think, Councillor Faulks' email.
 12 If I saw that, I probably saw this, and I would have
 13 alerted the media team, I imagine, but I can't remember,
 14 to try and respond to this, and --
 15 Q. Right.
 16 A. I mean, I think it is absolutely fair commentary and it
 17 is perfectly strong evidence that the borough was not
 18 covering all the bases that it needed to, either at the
 19 start or by this date, which was presumably the Friday.
 20 Q. Yes. Do you accept that no leaflet was in the event
 21 distributed by RBKC before the Saturday, the 17th?
 22 A. I think that's right, yeah, I think that's right.
 23 Q. What accounted for the delay?
 24 A. Well, I suspect that, as Mr Maxwell--Scott said, our
 25 media team was very small, and I think that it was too

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1 absorbed in reactive work with the media wanting answers
 2 to lots of questions, and really, you know, we had to
 3 forsake that purpose and get on with this, and we
 4 didn't. We weren't purposeful enough in this regard.
 5 Q. Did it not occur to you at that time, and this is now
 6 the 15th -- I mean, this is later, clearly, but on the
 7 15th -- that that was one area, comms, where you could
 8 ask for mutual aid?
 9 A. Well, correct, and we did get two people from the City
 10 of London, and if Martin Fitzpatrick had wanted more
 11 people, he could have obtained more people. But what we
 12 should have done is been alert to the possibility that
 13 he and his team were essentially getting submerged and
 14 they weren't coping.
 15 Q. Yes.
 16 Now, do you recall -- well, let's look at it.
 17 {RBK00002480}.
 18 Now, if we go, please, to the bottom of page 1, we
 19 can see that here is an email from Rock Feilding--Mellen
 20 to Amanda Gill, copied to you, and over the page
 21 {RBK00002480/2} we can see the email signed by
 22 Rock Feilding--Mellen:
 23 "Sorry to burden this with you now, when you have so
 24 much else to be doing, but I just skimmed the email
 25 below from Cllr Mills and it sounded to me as [though]

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1 she was suggesting the Council had a policy of only
 2 housing vulnerable residents last night (see her 3rd
 3 para). This is not my understanding of our policy?"
 4 Now, you were copied in to this. Can we take it
 5 that you also saw and read Councillor Mills' email
 6 halfway down page 2, which is an email to all
 7 the councillors and to Councillor Paget--Brown? Did you
 8 see that?
 9 A. I can see the copy list at the moment.
 10 Q. Yes. And then if you go to the top of page 3
 11 {RBK00002480/3}, you can see how it starts:
 12 "Thank you for this.
 13 "As you know I spent most of the day at Rugby
 14 Portobello and later visited St. James and
 15 St. Clements."
 16 And it goes on, and I just want to look at the third
 17 paragraph:
 18 "Really sad to see yesterday that it was only the
 19 disabled, over 65s and people with kids under 10 were to
 20 be housed last evening. Whatever the exigencies of this
 21 approach, some families had witnessed people throwing
 22 their kids down or losing touch with small children &
 23 friends and were so devastated that I personally found
 24 that the idea of not putting many more up quite
 25 extraordinary."

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1 Then two paragraphs down, after the reference to the
 2 evacuation of Lancaster West:
 3 "The manner in which this news was delivered by
 4 officers was equally insensitive. There were no Arabic
 5 interpreters that I could see. No news of missing
 6 people. One Sudanese group had travelled from
 7 Derbyshire to get news."
 8 Then a little bit lower down:
 9 "St. James told me that Westfield had offered 100000
 10 beds but KC officialdom had turned it down because KC
 11 insurance was not adequate."
 12 Just pausing there, is that right?
 13 A. I have to say, I don't recollect that at all. I've no
 14 idea what insurance would have to do with the offer of
 15 beds.
 16 Q. Then:
 17 "Fresh cold food was being delivered. It being
 18 Ramadan it could not be eaten. No storage facilities
 19 had been set up. Luckily Tabernacle Matthew and Pepe
 20 brought down hot food and suitable to some groups.
 21 "The traffic in the whole area meant congested side
 22 stress streets ... No messaging or coordination between
 23 centres."
 24 And then it says:
 25 "However there is still not a central trained

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1 coordinator with authority at each centre from the
 2 Council who can connect all the agencies. You may
 3 remember that I sent a message from all the centres
 4 yesterday asking for this. Maybe it will be different
 5 today ...
 6 " ... no number in this email which Councillors could
 7 use as a contact which might be good to provide."
 8 That's at the foot of the page.
 9 Then top of page 4 {RBK00002480/4}:
 10 "Which Cabinet Member is able to be contacted should
 11 a problem arise? No one was available yesterday and no
 12 briefing. May I suggest that Councillors are trained
 13 and mobilised in the future as part of the support
 14 process."
 15 Then in the penultimate paragraph:
 16 "When we come to examine this, we will need to
 17 establish how a much better emergency and comms
 18 procedure needs to be developed."
 19 Now, there's quite a lot in that by way of
 20 complaint, which travels far and wide, but the essential
 21 point is: do you accept that there were a number of
 22 areas of concern about the response raised with you at
 23 this point?
 24 A. Raised with me or others and copied to me, yes, I do.
 25 Q. Yes, and many of them focused on the paucity of the

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1 communication response.
 2 A. Yes, yes, absolutely.
 3 Q. Now, while we've got this email open, can we perhaps
 4 deal briefly with the question of how the senior
 5 leadership team in the council, including you, was
 6 communicating with councillors.
 7 In your Project Athena interview -- you remember the
 8 Project Athena interviews in the early part of 2018? Do
 9 you remember those?
 10 A. No, I don't, but I must have done them.
 11 Q. Right. Let's look at {RBK00029013}.
 12 A. Yeah.
 13 Q. Do you remember this meeting, this interview? It was
 14 an internal investigation conducted by RBKC, and you
 15 were interviewed as part of that process. Do you recall
 16 that?
 17 A. I think -- yes, yes, I remember the --
 18 Q. Right.
 19 A. Lennart Poulson, yeah.
 20 Q. Let's go to page 14 in it {RBK00029013/14}, then,
 21 please.
 22 At page 14, at the very foot of the page, you say:
 23 "I sent an email to all councillors on Wednesday
 24 evening at 6.38pm, and the Council Leader sent one maybe
 25 two days later. I think she [Judith Blakeman] has

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1 a semi--respectable case where, in a sense, they should
 2 have been bored by the number of communications from us
 3 telling them what we were doing but those emails were
 4 infrequent and I think we could have done better than
 5 that really."
 6 Is that right?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. You accept that?
 9 A. Absolutely.
 10 Q. Do you accept that to update councillors is one of your
 11 roles as Council Gold?
 12 A. Absolutely. Absolutely.
 13 Q. And do you consider that had councillors, and ward
 14 councillors in particular where Grenfell was situated,
 15 been promptly briefed, they could have provided
 16 an additional channel of communication between
 17 the council and those whom it was seeking to support?
 18 A. Yes, I completely accept that.
 19 Q. Let's then turn to Mark Sawyer's presence.
 20 You told us earlier in today's evidence this morning
 21 that he had attended on the morning of 15 June. He
 22 tells us in his statement that he was there to provide
 23 emergency planning and major incident response advice
 24 and support where requested. That's how he puts it;
 25 would you agree with that --

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1 A. I would.
 2 Q. -- characterisation?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Is it the case that, on 15 June, you and David Kerry had
 5 an initial meeting with Mark Sawyer before the 10 am
 6 wider RBKC Gold meeting?
 7 A. That sounds very -- yeah, sounds likely.
 8 Q. He says in his statement, does Mark Sawyer, that he
 9 raised a number of matters with you, including what it
 10 was that RBKC should consider by way of additional
 11 support it needed; do you agree?
 12 A. I think he would have done so, yes.
 13 Q. Do you remember it?
 14 A. Not specifically, but I'm completely happy to accept
 15 that he would have done so.
 16 Q. What was your view that morning as to the need for
 17 additional support?
 18 A. Well, probably humanitarian assistance would have been
 19 amongst them. I don't think I would have been
 20 sufficiently seized of the comms problems at that point
 21 to mention them specifically, but plainly that would
 22 have been a candidate as well. I think then -- and this
 23 overlaps with the humanitarian assistance -- there was
 24 the setting up of facilities that begin to help those
 25 who are bereaved as opposed to the survivors.

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1 Q. Now, let's go back to your Project Athena interview,
 2 please, at {RBK00029013/11}, and this is where, in the
 3 interview, you are explaining what happened on the
 4 Thursday, 15 June.
 5 If you look at the third paragraph down, in the
 6 third line, you say this. Do you see where it says,
 7 "What was different about Thursday"? Third paragraph
 8 down, third line in.
 9 A. Is that the paragraph beginning --
 10 Q. It begins "I would communicate".
 11 A. Yes, right.
 12 Q. Third line down, "What was different about Thursday".
 13 A. Yes, got it, yeah, "What was different about Thursday".
 14 Q. Yes. You say:
 15 "What was different about Thursday was that, even
 16 though we were not paying huge attention to media, the
 17 media focus was very much by that time on cause and
 18 blame. The first intimations that we were encountering
 19 criticism came on Thursday morning and the scale of the
 20 demand on the council was becoming clearer. There were
 21 also some follow up, additional auxiliary actions that
 22 the council was meant to be doing on the Thursday or
 23 soon afterwards, for example, at some point it was meant
 24 to open up a friends and family centre so that family of
 25 someone displaced by the fire would have somewhere to

1 meet them. I was a little bit worried that we as the
 2 council alone didn't have the bandwidth to become
 3 involved with this next wave of things that had to be
 4 done."
 5 Now, you say that the scale of the demand on the
 6 council was becoming clearer. Did you continue to
 7 believe that the council could cope on its own?
 8 A. No. I mean, Thursday was the day the penny dropped that
 9 it was beyond our capacity, at least insofar as I was
 10 able to direct it.
 11 Q. What was it that dropped the penny?
 12 A. Well, I think a range of things, each of them not too
 13 big, each of them potentially we could have dealt with,
 14 but in combination they were becoming too diverse and
 15 too numerous to think that we could get them all right
 16 to the extent that we would want to.
 17 So I think that enough of the media commentary
 18 percolated to make me think that there was need that we
 19 were not perceiving that we were not meeting, and I was
 20 worried that we -- my fault -- were slow off the mark
 21 with these -- supporting these complementary pursuits.
 22 So those were two things.
 23 The other thing was the extent to which
 24 the council's role was compromised by having been the
 25 owner of Grenfell Tower, and that causing understandable

1 anger in North Kensington.
 2 But the main thing was we were not getting -- we
 3 were getting enough queries, enough grounded complaint,
 4 enough sort of adverse comment of some sort or another
 5 to make it clear that we were not sufficiently far
 6 across the range of things that we should be addressing.
 7 Q. Right. I mean, adverse comment is one thing, but from
 8 what you could see, could you give us perhaps
 9 a shortlist -- as short as you can make it, if you
 10 can -- of the principal matters which on their own you
 11 could have coped with, but which cumulatively meant that
 12 you had been pushed over the edge?
 13 A. Well, I'm afraid, I mean, at this distance it is quite
 14 hard to be that specific. I think on the day there was
 15 an accumulation of people's misgivings, people seeing
 16 that there was confusion where by then there should have
 17 been less confusion, and we were, you know -- I mean,
 18 one of the former Cabinet Secretary's favourite words
 19 was "grip", and we were plainly not gripping enough
 20 facets of this crisis.
 21 Q. Right.
 22 I think you mentioned that in the mix was the fact
 23 that, as you saw it at least -- is this right? --
 24 the council was compromised because of the anger over
 25 the causes of the fire and the fact that RBKC was the

1 owner of the building?
 2 A. I think that was an element in it, and I think that if
 3 we had done well on other fronts, that might have been
 4 more manageable, but I don't think we were doing well
 5 enough to demonstrate to people that we had their
 6 interests at heart, we wanted to bring them as much
 7 support as possible. There was too much
 8 contraindication that we were failing in that, and that
 9 was a goad to people who thought very little of the
 10 council in the first place.
 11 Q. Now, it may be difficult to divide the day up into small
 12 slices, but can you remember more or less when it was on
 13 Thursday, 15 June that the penny dropped?
 14 A. Well, I think it was an accumulation during the day.
 15 You know, if there was a moment of revelation, then it
 16 has escaped me. I think by the time the phone call with
 17 John Barradell and others occurred, you know, I was
 18 very, very worried indeed.
 19 Q. Right.
 20 Let's take the day slightly more slowly. We start
 21 with the Gold meeting at 10.00 -- we've started already,
 22 but we're now going to the Gold meeting at 10.00 which
 23 you chaired. The minute is at {RBK00013270}, and we can
 24 see there that Mark Sawyer attended; do you see? It's
 25 the last name in the attendance list.

1 A. Yes.
 2 Q. And he says in his statement to the Inquiry -- we don't
 3 need to turn it up, it's paragraph 73 on page 14 of his
 4 statement {GOL00001349/14} -- that he'd suggested to you
 5 that the meeting had been very operational and not
 6 strategic enough. Is that right? Do you remember him
 7 saying that?
 8 A. I don't, but I completely accept such an observation.
 9 Q. Do you remember whether the RBKC Gold Group structure or
 10 strategy was changed after he'd said what he said?
 11 A. I think I invited him to help me and whoever was Silver
 12 at the time to improve the meetings accordingly. That
 13 was something that he could contribute to.
 14 Q. Let's have his statement up, then, at {GOL00001349/11}.
 15 I've put to you paragraph 73; let's look at paragraph 54
 16 on page 11. He says there:
 17 "However, in my opinion, I did not believe that
 18 Nicholas HOLGATE had complete awareness of the scale and
 19 complexity of what the Royal Borough of Kensington and
 20 Chelsea were being asked to deal with, with a lack of
 21 full situational awareness across the senior management
 22 team. It was also my opinion that the Royal Borough of
 23 Kensington and Chelsea had not been galvanised as
 24 an organisation due to witnessing members of staff
 25 seemingly continuing to deliver their day jobs whilst

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1 a small number of individuals appeared to be dealing
 2 with a significant number of issues at the same time."
 3 Do you agree that you didn't have, as he put it,
 4 a complete awareness of the scale and complexity of what
 5 RBKC were dealing with?
 6 A. I think I do now, yes.
 7 Q. You didn't at the time, I don't think, though, or did
 8 you at the time?
 9 A. I'm not sure I would have agreed with that opinion at
 10 the time. I certainly accept that opinion now.
 11 Q. No. I suppose you can't be aware of what you're not
 12 aware of.
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. In this case.
 15 Were you aware that Mr Sawyer had raised with
 16 Tony Redpath his concerns about the BECC not operating
 17 effectively?
 18 A. I don't recall that, but it's perfectly possible that he
 19 would have said it to me.
 20 Q. Right.
 21 Do you remember whether you knew that Mr Sawyer had
 22 raised the absence of a sit rep from the BECC before any
 23 RBKC Gold meeting and that that was hindering
 24 situational awareness?
 25 A. No, I don't remember that, but it sounds like a very

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1 sensible observation to have made.
 2 Q. It's a fact -- and tell me if this is wrong -- that in
 3 fact no situation report was produced by the BECC until
 4 the morning of 16 June, the Friday.
 5 A. That may be so, but I think what we were trying to do
 6 was to get the person in charge of or just completing
 7 being in charge of the BECC to come to the Gold meeting,
 8 but I accept that a written report would have been
 9 better.
 10 Q. Yes. I mean, given that, as you described it in the
 11 Project Athena interview, the BECC should have been the
 12 spider at the centre of the web, can you account for why
 13 there was no situational awareness report or sit rep
 14 produced by it until more than 48 hours after --
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. -- the end of the incident?
 17 A. Well, I would imagine that they were absolutely flat out
 18 on other functions, including responding to emails,
 19 phone calls and so on.
 20 Q. And again, that comes back to why they were so flat out
 21 that they couldn't give senior management within
 22 the council a situation report.
 23 A. Yeah, it does, and there were too few of them.
 24 Q. Too few of them?
 25 A. Yeah.

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1 Q. Now, do you remember after the RBKC Gold meeting at
 2 10 am Rebecca Blackburn advising you to seek assistance,
 3 invoking London Gold?
 4 A. I don't, but that would certainly have been one of the
 5 pennies dropping during that day.
 6 Q. She says in her evidence -- let me just show this to
 7 you, to be precise. This is at {RBK00035364/8},
 8 paragraph 37, and she confirmed this when she came to
 9 give evidence to the Inquiry. If we look at that, she
 10 says:
 11 "During the day, I spoke to Tony Redpath and
 12 Nicholas Holgate about when responsibility for managing
 13 the incident would return to the Borough. I suggested
 14 that they seek assistance from other London boroughs
 15 invoking London Gold. Nicholas told me that he had
 16 received an e-mail from the Chief Executive of Southwark
 17 Council offering assistance. He said she had particular
 18 experience from the Lakanal House Fire. I had the
 19 impression that senior management at the Borough were
 20 reluctant to seek mutual aid, despite the fact I had
 21 advised Nicholas Holgate and Tony Redpath to activate
 22 London Gold after the Gold meeting."
 23 Now, leaving aside her impression, do you agree or
 24 can you recall the facts to which she speaks in that
 25 paragraph there?

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1 A. Well, again, I think there is this distinction between
 2 invoking London Gold and seeking and accepting specific
 3 assistance from other London boroughs. The latter was
 4 absolutely fine more or less from the start of the
 5 crisis. The former, in the course of Thursday, this was
 6 the direction I was moving in. You know, it's perfectly
 7 reasonable to say I should have moved faster.

8 Q. Do you remember telling her, when she advised invoking
 9 London Gold during the morning of the 15th, "We don't
 10 think we're there yet"? Do you remember that?

11 A. I don't remember specifically saying that, but if she
 12 says I did, then I'm very happy to accept that.

13 Q. Right. So can we take it that before noon on that day,
 14 or lunchtime perhaps on that day, you were still in the
 15 position of not thinking you were needing to invoke the
 16 London Gold arrangements?

17 A. I think that's fair comment, yeah.

18 Q. Why was that? Why did you think, come that point, that
 19 the time was not yet ripe for activating London Gold?

20 A. Well, my perception was that we had a great many
 21 officers doing what they could to, first of all, assist
 22 the survivors, and then carrying out quite a few other
 23 tasks. It was not necessarily going to be the case that
 24 they were going to achieve instant success or do exactly
 25 the right thing the first time, and I think that there

1 had to be a little opportunity for them to do what they
 2 thought was right, not quite get it right, adjust it and
 3 get it right. So, you know, there's an element of
 4 having to learn as we went, given the very particular
 5 circumstances of this crisis. And, you know, to some
 6 degree, that was fine, but actually the extent of
 7 learning and the inability to sort of embody the
 8 learning in the next iteration of any one task made it
 9 clear that we were not getting on top of it.

10 Q. Does that speak to a defect in the training, or
 11 an absence of training?

12 A. I think -- well, I think you beg a very profound
 13 question about the extent to which training in
 14 emergencies has to permeate a borough. So my perception
 15 of training was that senior management had some exposure
 16 to it, and over the years they would all have had some
 17 exposure to real crises -- not on this scale, but
 18 nevertheless emergencies of one sort or another. My
 19 reflection now is that I do not know, but I believe that
 20 it may be the case, that a lot of the staff who were
 21 needed to deliver difficult pieces of work in the
 22 aftermath of this tragedy would not have had much
 23 training at all, and I do not think that that would have
 24 been unusual.

25 My suspicion is that the model of responsiveness

1 focused on people -- focused, as it were, a lot of what
 2 training there was on a relatively small number of
 3 people who would have been primarily in the borough
 4 emergency control centre, and I do not think necessarily
 5 that much training routinely spread out much wider than
 6 that, and I think that that was a problem, if I'm right,
 7 because it would have made those individual staff
 8 members less able to judge whether they were having the
 9 requisite success, and that, again, through no fault of
 10 their own -- absolutely no fault of their own -- would
 11 have slowed down the sort of feedback up the chain which
 12 might have shown us that we were not getting to where we
 13 needed to go.

14 Q. Let's turn, then, to the support of central government.
 15 Now, we know Melanie Dawes was the
 16 Permanent Secretary to the DCLG, as it was then called.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Let's go to {CLG00003084}, email at 09.52 to you on
 19 15 June, "Call with Melanie Dawes at DCLG":
 20 "Melanie has asked if you might be available later
 21 this morning to speak?
 22 "Melanie is currently in a meeting with the
 23 Secretary of State that is due to finish around 10:15."
 24 Did you speak to her that day?

25 A. I think I did.

1 Q. Right.
 2 Now, we know that on that day London Resilience
 3 forwarded to you an email from the department. Let's go
 4 to that. It's at {GOL00001196}. You can see there, the
 5 second email down, that Toby Gould forwards you an email
 6 that he had received from Philip James to him at just
 7 after 10 o'clock, so about a minute into your Gold
 8 meeting on that morning, and if you look at that email
 9 at the bottom of page 1, it says:
 10 "A further 3 things from DCLG."
 11 And then item 2:
 12 "We have heard from some of the residents who spent
 13 the night in the rest centre saying how there was very
 14 little or in some cases no bedding and pillows. Can you
 15 confirm that you have organisations such as the
 16 Red Cross and the Samaritans involved and that there
 17 will be better sleeping facilities tonight?"
 18 Mark Sawyer responds on your behalf, if you look up:
 19 "Nicholas, Mark,
 20 "A positive response to DCLG's questions below would
 21 be appreciated.
 22 "Nicholas, if you would like to appoint someone to
 23 be their main point of contact for you rather than
 24 through us please let me know."
 25 Did you liaise with the DCLG in relation to the

1 sleeping facilities at the rest centre or offer of
 2 support from the press office, which was the other offer
 3 made?
 4 A. I don't remember the offer from the press office. The
 5 point about the sleeping facilities would have surprised
 6 me, because that was not a point registered with me when
 7 I visited the Westway Sports Centre first thing that
 8 morning. So that might have been -- there would have
 9 been, perhaps, another loop in the back and forward with
 10 whoever was then helping to run the Westway Sports
 11 Centre.
 12 Q. Right.
 13 Now, according to Jo Farrar, who was the director
 14 general for local government and public services at the
 15 DCLG at the time --
 16 A. Yeah.
 17 Q. -- she says you and she spoke around about noon on
 18 15 June; do you remember that?
 19 A. I think so, yeah.
 20 Q. Yes. Do you remember what you discussed?
 21 A. Not in specifics, no.
 22 Q. Let's look at her statement. That's at
 23 {CLG00030414/10}. This is Jo Farrar's Inquiry
 24 statement, page 10, paragraph 44. She says:
 25 "At 12.30pm [that's the time she puts on it] I spoke

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1 to Nicholas Holgate. I had contacted him the previous
 2 day, but this was the first time he was available to
 3 speak to me. Amongst other things, we discussed the
 4 rehousing effort, the involvement of London Resilience
 5 Partnership, emergency financial aid and counselling
 6 support."
 7 Just pausing there, do you remember that? Do you
 8 remember discussing those matters?
 9 A. Not very well, but very happy to accept her account.
 10 Q. She goes on to say:
 11 "I restated the Department's broad offer of
 12 assistance; he reiterated that RBKC had plenty of
 13 support from the Department and others, including
 14 volunteers and colleagues from other local authorities,
 15 and indicated in general terms that the Council was
 16 managing well."
 17 Do you recall saying those things?
 18 A. Well, I think I was at the edge of thinking that at the
 19 time. I'd be surprised if I was quite that confident
 20 with her, because, you know, there were
 21 contraindications. So -- and I wouldn't have wanted to
 22 give her a sort of falsely optimistic picture, frankly.
 23 Q. Right. She goes on to say:
 24 "I twice raised the issue of whether RBKC needed
 25 support, but he was firm in his assurances that no

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1 further support was needed."
 2 A. Well, yes.
 3 Q. Is that right?
 4 A. I suspect that I did not have a specific requirement of
 5 her for further support.
 6 Q. She goes on to say:
 7 "Given the scale of the disaster and the number of
 8 people bereaved and made homeless as a result, it seemed
 9 unlikely -- based on my own experience -- that RBKC did
 10 not need substantial support, but Nicholas Holgate's
 11 clear position was that RBKC had plenty of support."
 12 Now, that's the impression she had.
 13 A. Yeah.
 14 Q. Would you say that, from the conversation, that was
 15 an unreasonable impression and she'd got the wrong end
 16 of the stick?
 17 A. Well, I think that it is true, given the offers of
 18 support from other boroughs and volunteers and
 19 the Red Cross and suchlike, that we did have plenty of
 20 support. We did not have, one can say with certainty
 21 with hindsight, sufficient support. But I think it was
 22 as much about the brigading of the support that we had
 23 as opposed to the quantum.
 24 Q. If this is the way the conversation proceeded, then it
 25 doesn't sound -- is this fair? -- that the penny had yet

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1 dropped, and you hadn't gone over the edge.
 2 A. Not completely, no.
 3 Q. Well, not at all.
 4 A. Well, as I say, I think this -- I would be surprised if
 5 at that point on Thursday I was saying we were fine,
 6 because I don't think by that stage I knew that we were
 7 not fine, but we may have been at the point where
 8 I thought things were still mendable if people were
 9 learning and drawing on extra support where it was
 10 possible to do so.
 11 Q. Right.
 12 A. So I think it's just -- you know, it's not a long way
 13 away, but I think it's a little way away from where
 14 I would have been.
 15 Q. So we can time -- she says 12.30 pm, and she has
 16 a reference for that.
 17 A. Yeah.
 18 Q. We can time your continued refusal -- is this fair? --
 19 of central government support, at the very least, and
 20 your view that you had plenty of support persisting to
 21 at least 12.30 pm on the 15th.
 22 A. Yes. I was not that confident that central government
 23 had something that we didn't have and which we needed.
 24 So I know she has a little list there, and, I mean,
 25 emergency financial aid was useful, did come onstream

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1 a few days later, but these things are relatively
 2 high-level. They are not something that I could have
 3 worked out how to plug in.
 4 I mean, I don't know what she means, for instance,
 5 by the rehousing effort. You know, they didn't have
 6 properties that they could offer us, for example.
 7 Q. Now, do you recall also being offered assistance from
 8 the Red Cross during the course of the 15th?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. You do.
 11 Let's look at {RBK00065083}. This is an email from
 12 Michael Adamson of BRC, British Red Cross, at 19.57 on
 13 15 June, so we have now come to the evening, 8 o'clock
 14 or so on that evening, and you can see the email at the
 15 top to you, timed at 19.57, copying or sending on to you
 16 an email that he had sent to you, I think, chiefex@rbkc,
 17 on 15 June at 13.30. "How can we help?"
 18 Now, looking at the one at 13.30, so this is an hour
 19 after your call with Jo Farrar in central government,
 20 here is a message from British Red Cross:
 21 "Dear Nicholas
 22 "It was good to talk earlier."
 23 Then if you go down to the a) three-quarters of the
 24 way down your screen, he offers to help:
 25 "a) using our Disaster Fund to make immediate cash

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1 donations to people who are registered residents and
 2 want it to meet short-term financial need; we have
 3 already allocated £100k from our disaster fund and would
 4 be happy to make an initial condition-free grant to each
 5 household of £250; we can use pre-pay cards, so it is
 6 'clean'; we can also provide someone to advise the
 7 council, on how to do this, if you prefer to do it
 8 yourself."
 9 That was the offer.
 10 Do you agree that that would have been a very
 11 efficient way in which to provide financial assistance
 12 to families who needed it?
 13 A. Yeah.
 14 Q. Yes.
 15 We can see that he refers to a discussion. Do you
 16 remember that discussion?
 17 A. Yes, I do, and, I mean, this is a good example of not
 18 thinking of the right answer.
 19 So when we had that conversation and he made that
 20 offer, my concern was that the Red Cross would use up
 21 its own money in this way, when it might need that money
 22 for many other purposes, and actually the council would
 23 fund all the help that survivors and others might need.
 24 But what I should have done is seize the offer of the
 25 prepaid cards and simply agree that the council would

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1 fund them. That is what I should have done.
 2 Q. Yes, I see. In fact, you refused the offer, didn't you?
 3 A. That's right, because I thought that it was
 4 the Red Cross using up money that could be put to some
 5 other use, when in this case there was a source of
 6 funds -- essentially, in effect, unlimited -- that
 7 the council itself would deploy.
 8 Q. Did you refuse the offer during the conversation which
 9 preceded this email or was there a later conversation?
 10 A. I think we talked mid-afternoon on the Thursday. So,
 11 I mean, this is an account -- a perfectly fair account
 12 of what he had offered.
 13 Q. Right.
 14 Now, there was then a ministerial meeting at 3.30,
 15 15.30, on 15 June. I think you managed to attend. You
 16 dialled into it.
 17 A. I'm not sure I did.
 18 Q. Well, let's look at the minute, {CAB00002720}. You're
 19 saying you're not sure you did.
 20 A. Mm-hm. Well, if I'm dialling in, I'm dialling in.
 21 Q. Yes, you're dialling in. You see the list of attendees
 22 there. Nick Hurd in the chair.
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. Alok Sharma is present as the Minister of State.
 25 A. That rings a bell -- the chair rings a bell.

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1 Q. Yes. Then there is a list of names, some of which are
 2 familiar, and then there is your name, dialling in,
 3 together with Neil Jerome, who was Gold Command from
 4 the Met, and Dominic Ellis from LFB Gold.
 5 Right, so can we take it you did?
 6 A. Yeah.
 7 Q. Then if you go, please, to page 2 {CAB00002720/2}, top,
 8 it says:
 9 "THE CHAIR opened by emphasising the need for
 10 rigorous understanding of the situation affecting
 11 individuals to inform the response."
 12 Now, this was your first ministerial meeting. What
 13 message did you provide by way of an update? Or did you
 14 not say anything?
 15 A. I think that they were relying on the Cabinet Office --
 16 it is possible that they were relying on the
 17 Cabinet Office CRIP report as their principal source.
 18 Q. CRIP?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. I've seen that --
 21 A. It's an acronym for --
 22 Q. Yes, it is.
 23 A. I can't remember what it stands for, but it was what the
 24 Cabinet Office produced for either most or all of the
 25 ministerial meetings over those days.

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1 So I think that, for instance, I'm not sure I'd have
 2 been across the fact that the A40 was closed or not, so
 3 that sort of fact would have had to come from someone
 4 else co-ordinating across government departments.
 5 Q. Do you remember saying anything at the meeting?
 6 A. I don't remember saying anything, but if I looked
 7 through the entire account, I could pick out something
 8 that might have been me.
 9 Q. Right. Well, let's not do that.
 10 A. No.
 11 Q. In general terms, how did you think the meeting went?
 12 A. Well, I mean, given that I can barely remember attending
 13 it, I don't think I can claim too much of an account of
 14 it, but I think that this was to some degree ministers
 15 getting a more granular -- well, a more detailed
 16 understanding of the facets of the crisis in the round,
 17 with specifics like, you know, transport impediments or
 18 whatever. I wouldn't have said that it was necessarily
 19 much of a contribution to sorting something. I think it
 20 was them getting into the idea that this was going to be
 21 a big issue for at least a number of days to come.
 22 Q. Right.
 23 Now, I want to just put a couple of instances of
 24 those who were there and their impression of what your
 25 contribution was.

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1 A. Sure.
 2 Q. Can we please go first to {CLG00030412/21}. What I'm
 3 showing you is Katherine Richardson's witness statement
 4 to the Inquiry, paragraph 77.
 5 Now, Katherine Richardson was, as you may have
 6 remembered, the deputy director of RED, the resilience
 7 and emergency division of the DCLG, and she says here at
 8 paragraph 77 that she attended this meeting, and she
 9 says in the second sentence:
 10 "Nick Holgate, RBKC Chief Executive, was not able to
 11 answer detailed questions about the situation on the
 12 ground and appeared quite defensive, trying to assure
 13 Ministers that no additional help was required."
 14 Now, just pausing there. Leaving aside her
 15 impression of your being defensive, was it the case as
 16 a fact that you were not able to answer detailed
 17 questions about the situation on the ground?
 18 A. I mean, it's quite possible that they had specific
 19 questions to which I did not know the answer.
 20 Q. Did you try to assure ministers that no additional help
 21 was required?
 22 A. I'd be very surprised if I was so straightforward in
 23 that respect. What I would probably have said is
 24 something along the lines of, "Here is what we think we
 25 are doing, you know, as it were, I'm not sure where the

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1 gaps are, there will be gaps, but I'm not sure what
 2 additional help you can offer".
 3 Q. Did you form the impression in your own turn about what
 4 impression she had and those others at the meeting had
 5 about whether you were providing adequate reassurance to
 6 them?
 7 A. I don't think I would have gained the impression that
 8 they would have been satisfied. I think that they would
 9 have been rightly concerned.
 10 Q. Let's go next to Katherine Hammond's statement,
 11 {CAB00014764/18}, please, paragraph 62.
 12 Now, Katherine Hammond from whom we'll be hearing in
 13 this module later, was the Cabinet Office director of
 14 the civil contingencies secretariat, or the CCS. She
 15 says here in paragraph 62:
 16 "The meeting opened with an update on the current
 17 situation ..."
 18 Then she goes on to say:
 19 "However, I recall being a little concerned that
 20 there was an absence of data which a local authority
 21 might have been expected to have readily available (most
 22 notably the numbers of tenants in Grenfell Tower).
 23 Mr Holgate was also unable to articulate any plan beyond
 24 the immediate for rehousing or supporting those
 25 affected, or what resources would be needed from outside

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1 RBKC for that to occur. My overall impression from
 2 Mr Holgate at the 15 June 2017 meeting was that RBKC was
 3 overwhelmed by the requirements of its role in relation
 4 to the fire."
 5 Do you remember being unable to give
 6 Katherine Hammond any assurance about the numbers of
 7 tenants in Grenfell Tower or matters of that nature?
 8 A. I am surprised at that, because I've had a figure of
 9 129, or very near offer, you know, on my mind for a very
 10 long time.
 11 Q. Well, those are the numbers of flats --
 12 A. That's right, that's right.
 13 Q. -- not the numbers of tenants.
 14 A. No, no, but as a starting point --
 15 Q. Right.
 16 A. -- I would have known that number, I think. But you're
 17 right, I wouldn't have known the number of tenants in
 18 each flat and been able to add them up to a total, that
 19 is true.
 20 Q. Right.
 21 From what you could tell at the meeting, do you
 22 think that they did have the impression to which
 23 Ms Hammond speaks, namely that RBKC was overwhelmed by
 24 the requirements of its role?
 25 A. I would not have wanted to give them a false assurance.

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1 Q. Right.

2 A. So, you know, I'm sure that they had questions left

3 unanswered, absolutely.

4 Q. Right. I mean, was it not clear to you by the time of

5 this meeting -- 3.30 in the afternoon of the Thursday,

6 15 June 2017 -- that everybody was telling you that RBKC

7 could have extra help and needed it?

8 A. I was clear that there were offers of help. I was

9 hopeful that where we knew we wanted specific help, we

10 would get it. And, I mean, by this stage I was reaching

11 the conclusion that we were not succeeding nearly well

12 enough on several fronts and it was getting beyond us.

13 Q. But you didn't tell them that at the meeting.

14 A. Well, you know, I was in the throes of trying to work

15 out what I thought, I think.

16 Q. Do you accept now that your approach at the time was

17 completely misguided and that you should have been

18 asking for help a lot earlier?

19 A. I think what I wanted to do was be sure what help we

20 wanted so that we knew how it would work and complement

21 and fit in with what the council was doing, and so for

22 me, offers of general help were reassuring and were

23 someone to go back to later if I thought that there was

24 a match, but what I wasn't able to cope with was lots of

25 offers of general help.

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1 Q. Now, can we then turn to a meeting with John Barradell

2 later that day. It's 5 o'clock now. We've come from

3 3.30 to 5 pm.

4 Do you remember that there was a telephone call that

5 you convened, at Mark Sawyer's suggestion, with

6 John Barradell, Eleanor Kelly and Mark Sawyer?

7 A. I remember there was such a conversation then, yes.

8 Q. Do you remember what its purpose was?

9 A. Well, I thought it was the second in the series.

10 Whether or not I convened it, I thought that there had

11 been an expectation from the phone call on Wednesday

12 that there would be a similar phone call at a similar

13 time on Thursday.

14 Q. I see.

15 Did you intend to invoke the Gold resolution on that

16 call?

17 A. Yes, I think I -- by that stage, I thought, you know,

18 given some of the things we've talked about and, as

19 I say in my statement, there were three -- in a sense,

20 three categories of problem which I couldn't begin to

21 convince myself by that stage we were going to succeed

22 at.

23 Q. Right.

24 Now, does that tell us that you had come to the

25 conclusion that you needed to invoke London Gold between

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1 the end of the ministerial meeting at 3.30 on the

2 afternoon of 15 June and 5 pm that day?

3 A. Well, I think that's giving it a precision which it

4 probably doesn't deserve. I think that the concerns had

5 been growing in the course of the day, and the Thursday

6 telephone meeting was a chance to, in a sense, confront

7 them myself, confront the shortcomings myself, and to

8 say, "This isn't working", or, "I cannot say this is

9 working".

10 Q. Well, you say it's undeserved precision. The reason

11 I put it to you that way is because there's no hint at

12 all in the minute of the 3.30 ministerial meeting from

13 you that you were even contemplating invoking LLAG Gold,

14 let alone intending to do so.

15 A. Yes, I don't think that that is quite right as to what

16 I was prepared to say or could say at that meeting.

17 I think, again, it's a distinction between a willingness

18 to accept help, yes, a willingness to take up specific

19 help where we knew we needed it, versus a sort of

20 general -- a general acknowledgement of insufficiency,

21 which I didn't think we were quite at that role, and

22 I fear, with hindsight, that they may have taken my

23 unwillingness to acknowledge insufficiency more or less

24 across the board as a belief that at least in some

25 respects we were performing adequately.

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1 Q. Now, let's go to your statement, then, at page 7

2 {RBK00035426/7}, paragraph 38, your main statement, and

3 you say there:

4 "It was my decision [it was my decision] to invoke

5 London Gold in a phone conversation with John Barradell

6 and others on the evening of 15 June. There were

7 essentially three reasons why I chose then to hand the

8 response over to London Gold. First, a time would come

9 when doing what we were day after day would not be

10 manageable: staff would become exhausted and thus less

11 capable of assisting the survivors and those left

12 homeless. Second, under the contingency planning

13 guidance, there are many other duties that have to be

14 carried out as time goes on and in the long term we

15 might not have managed due to the scale and complexity

16 of the disaster. Third, residents of north Kensington

17 were angry with the Council, assuming perhaps that it

18 should be held responsible for the fire. I believed

19 that escalation to London Gold would help to deflect

20 this belief from affecting our work with survivors from

21 the fire."

22 Now, let's just break that down, if we can, because

23 there's a lot in the paragraph.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. You say first, if we go back, please, to page 7, in the

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1 third line :
 2 "First, a time would come [a time would come] when
 3 doing what we were day after day would not be
 4 manageable ..."
 5 Given that you say a time would come, did you
 6 believe that at that point your staff were managing the
 7 response and were capable of assisting those affected by
 8 the fire ?
 9 A. I think in at least some ways they were doing so, but
 10 they were not doing so across the board.
 11 Q. Right.
 12 A. And, I mean, you have given examples already --
 13 Q. Yes.
 14 A. -- where we were failing to communicate, for example.
 15 Q. Yes, and then you say:
 16 "Second, under the contingency planning guidance,
 17 there are many other duties that have to be carried out
 18 as time goes on and in the long term we might not have
 19 managed due to the scale and complexity of the
 20 disaster ."
 21 So does that tell us that at that moment you thought
 22 your staff were managing in the short term, and that
 23 bringing in London Gold was essentially a projective
 24 activity ?
 25 A. I think a mixture of the two. I think that with the

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1 comms team as an obvious example, the housing department
 2 less so, and then the humanitarian assistance as another
 3 example, I think, you know, we were not safely achieving
 4 everything that it was necessary to achieve. So,
 5 you know, I think this undersells it a bit, I have to
 6 say.
 7 Q. Yes, and your third reason is what you said earlier :
 8 it's the compromise that had arisen as a result of
 9 people blaming the council for the fire .
 10 A. Yeah.
 11 Q. None of those reasons that you've set out there suggest,
 12 do they, that the council was at that time, in your view
 13 at that time, incapable of managing the response?
 14 A. I think we were getting very close to -- I mean, with
 15 hindsight, one can see that we were not managing the
 16 response. Individual departments or individual
 17 activities were going more or less well, and, for
 18 instance, the housing department had done, I think,
 19 quite well to find so many people and to offer
 20 accommodation, albeit imperfectly and with mistakes and
 21 so on. But I do not think that across a breadth of
 22 quite demanding, complicated activities, we were hitting
 23 the mark, and I think, you know, it was more present and
 24 less future than this implies.
 25 Q. Now, if you go to paragraph 39 on the next page of your

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1 statement {RBK00035426/8}, please, you say in the first
 2 sentence:
 3 "There is no formal procedure for handover to
 4 London Gold."
 5 You have corrected that --
 6 A. Yeah.
 7 Q. -- in coming in today. Then you say:
 8 "But I was clear that others on the phone call had
 9 also reached the view that Kensington and Chelsea should
 10 no longer lead on these responsibilities ."
 11 Was it clear to you what the reasons were for those
 12 others on the call having reached that view?
 13 A. Well, I think that they had been taking probably an ever
 14 closer interest in how the tragedy was being reported,
 15 and they were very sensibly and correctly putting two
 16 and two together, and they could see that there wasn't
 17 a sense of positive development; there was criticism and
 18 there was dismay and there was unmet need in the way
 19 that the councillors had identified .
 20 Q. You see, really what I'm seeking to get at is whether,
 21 when the decision was made, you were making it because
 22 you thought you could cope now but might not be able to
 23 cope in the longer term, but the others on the call
 24 wanted you to invoke London Gold because they thought
 25 you couldn't cope now. Is that a fair way of looking at

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1 it ?
 2 A. No, I think we were very -- well, I mean, in a sense,
 3 it's too fine a distinction for people to hang anything
 4 very significant on it. I thought that we were doing
 5 some things just about well enough, but we were
 6 certainly not doing well enough across the piece.
 7 Q. Right.
 8 Was it the case that, in fact, by finally agreeing
 9 to trigger London Gold at 5 pm on the evening of the
 10 15th, you were reluctantly responding to external
 11 pressure due to growing concerns about the council's
 12 inability to lead on the response effort ?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 MR MILLETT: Yes.
 15 Mr Chairman, is that a convenient moment?
 16 SIR MARTIN MOORE--BICK: Yes, it is, thank you very much.
 17 We will have a short break now, Mr Holgate. We will
 18 come back at 3.30, please.
 19 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 20 SIR MARTIN MOORE--BICK: And, again, please don't discuss
 21 your evidence while you're out of the room.
 22 THE WITNESS: No.
 23 SIR MARTIN MOORE--BICK: Thank you.
 24 (Pause)
 25 Thank you, Mr Millett. 3.30, please.

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1 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 2 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you.
 3 (3.16 pm)
 4 (A short break)
 5 (3.30 pm)
 6 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Well, when you're ready, we'll
 7 resume the hearing. Thank you very much.
 8 Yes, are you ready, Mr Holgate?
 9 THE WITNESS: Yes.
 10 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much.
 11 Yes, Mr Millett.
 12 MR MILLETT: Thank you, Mr Chairman.
 13 Now, activation of the Gold resolution. I just want
 14 some help from you about your understanding about what
 15 that involved.
 16 Did you consider that it was a mechanism to help
 17 a single local authority or transfer of control to
 18 another chief executive?
 19 A. I think it involved the transfer to another chief
 20 executive. So if I had invoked London Gold on the
 21 Wednesday morning, it would have gone to
 22 Andrew Blake—Herbert or Chris Naylor.
 23 Q. They were the duty LLAGs?
 24 A. Yeah.
 25 Q. Now, {RBK00065121}, please. Let's see how this

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1 transpired. This is an email from you to David Kerry
 2 early in the morning of the 16th at 02.53 —
 3 A. Yeah.
 4 Q. — you see that, telling him that the LLAG has been
 5 invoked:
 6 "Have invoked llag. Hope J Barradell will join by
 7 10 today to help expand our capacity."
 8 Why did you leave it until almost 3 o'clock in the
 9 morning on the 16th to tell David Kerry that the LLAG
 10 had been invoked?
 11 A. I think that — by then I don't think I had seen a note
 12 of the meeting, indeed I don't think I'd seen a note of
 13 the meeting at all, and it was on my mind, as you can
 14 see, as it was round about 3 am, and that was my
 15 understanding of John Barradell's plan. I thought
 16 I probably hadn't shared it yet, so I was sharing it
 17 then.
 18 Q. You say, "to help expand our capacity". Was it your
 19 understanding that, in fact, London Gold would be
 20 assisting RBKC by expanding your capacity, but that you
 21 weren't handing over control?
 22 A. No, I think that — I can't remember the terms on which
 23 the phone conversation had concluded, but I was
 24 certainly expecting to be, in effect, superseded, and,
 25 I mean, "to help expand our capacity" is a sort of round

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1 about way of saying, you know, we're going to draw on
 2 the resources of at least some if not many other London
 3 boroughs in a more full—on sense than we've done so far.
 4 Q. I wonder if that's right.
 5 Can we look at an email you sent a little bit later
 6 that morning at {RBK00005673}. This is an email sent by
 7 you at 06.14 on the 16th, so three and a half hours
 8 after you sent the message to David Kerry we've just
 9 looked at, to him again, copied to Tony Redpath and
 10 Stuart Priestley, and what you're doing is sending to
 11 them as an FYI an email you sent the minute before to
 12 Carolyn Downs, Charlie Parker at Westminster and
 13 Kim Dero at Hammersmith and Fulham; yes? In that you
 14 say:
 15 "Thank you for your several offers of help. Last
 16 night I invoked London wide (LLAG) arrangements so we
 17 may be seeking help from many colleagues. However
 18 I suggest that, given the location of the Tower, our
 19 four boroughs form a nucleus."
 20 Did you think that you, or RBKC at least, would
 21 still be leading the relief effort, the response, but
 22 with support now from Westminster, Hammersmith and
 23 Fulham and perhaps other boroughs?
 24 A. No. I think the sentence "Last night I invoked London
 25 wide ... arrangements so we may be seeking help from

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1 many colleagues" meant we, as in London Gold with RBKC
 2 working to London Gold, may be seeking help from many
 3 colleagues, meant that, I mean, any London borough could
 4 be asked to give support.
 5 Q. Right.
 6 A. But I was conscious that these four boroughs were all
 7 close to — relatively close to the Westway Sports
 8 Centre, and I think I was worried, given some of the
 9 feedback you've already touched on, that we weren't
 10 doing well enough there, so here was something we could
 11 do in the meantime if they were amenable.
 12 Q. Yes, I see.
 13 Now, in the preparatory questionnaire for your
 14 Project Athena interview, which was done, as I've shown
 15 you, in early 2018, you indicated that, by invoking
 16 LLAG, you were "agreeing to cede Gold responsibilities
 17 to John Barradell" {RBK00060379/5}. I'm not going to
 18 show it to you unless you want to see it, but that is
 19 what you say.
 20 Was that your belief at the time, that you were
 21 ceding Gold responsibilities to John Barradell, or is it
 22 just a description of what occurred?
 23 A. I think because I had understood that John was going to
 24 come to the council the next morning, that he was going
 25 to be the London Gold to begin with, and, I mean, I was

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1 conscious of the rota that chief executives formed, so
 2 I probably didn't think he was going to do it for a long
 3 time, but I think I thought he was the first of
 4 a series.
 5 Q. I see. Did you think you were going to remain in charge
 6 in practical terms into Friday, until John Barradell had
 7 in practical terms taken over?
 8 A. I think the answer is no. I think that if you had asked
 9 me round about 8 o'clock in the morning, I would have
 10 said: I am introducing John to the various people
 11 working hard across the council and he is going to start
 12 taking decisions and, you know, showing us where we have
 13 gone wrong and giving himself a freer hand than I had
 14 given myself to draw on potentially large numbers of
 15 people from other boroughs.
 16 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Am I right in understanding that he
 17 assumed the position of Gold simply by virtue of being
 18 in that point on the rota?
 19 A. That --
 20 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: He wasn't chosen for his particular
 21 expertise?
 22 A. That might be so, Mr Chairman. I felt that he --
 23 insofar as London borough chief executives had any
 24 expert, it was he. He and Eleanor Kelly, working in
 25 support of him, I think, were the two chief executives

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1 who, as it were, specialised in how the boroughs should
 2 work singly or together to provide emergency support,
 3 and I was not sure -- I mean, I wouldn't have been able
 4 to tell you whether he was the person on the rota or
 5 not.
 6 SIR MARTIN MOORE-BICK: Right, thank you.
 7 MR MILLETT: What was your understanding of the role London
 8 Local Authority Gold held in relation to the
 9 responsibility for the Grenfell Tower residents and
 10 wider evacuees, evacuees from other buildings?
 11 A. I would have said that the tragedy had to be managed --
 12 however multifaceted it was, it would probably have to
 13 be managed as a single programme, and therefore even if
 14 London Gold was willing in practice to delegate some
 15 particular function to another borough, that would be
 16 his decision.
 17 So, you know, a very good move they made, I think,
 18 early the following week, if not sooner, was to put
 19 Ealing borough in charge of the Westway Sports Centre,
 20 and that was a very good way of bringing senior people
 21 and a largish number of people to bring order to
 22 something that obviously hadn't had enough order before
 23 then.
 24 Q. Now, let me show you a document from central government
 25 after the fire and after the after effects,

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1 {CAB00014768}. This is a Cabinet Office document.
 2 Now, if we can just go, please, to page 1 of this
 3 document, I can show you what it is. It's a lessons
 4 learnt document:
 5 "Grenfell Tower tragedy -- lessons for the central
 6 response."
 7 I would like just to show you page 3
 8 {CAB00014768/3}, please, and explore paragraph 12 with
 9 you. It says:
 10 "CRIPs were issued daily based on information
 11 sourced via a number of departments and, in particular,
 12 from Gold via DCLG."
 13 Then it goes on halfway down the paragraph:
 14 "There was also uncertainty over the respective role
 15 of the Council and 'Recovery Gold' -- COBR understood
 16 that the latter (John Bar[r]adell) had taken control of
 17 the response on the ground, but it subsequently
 18 transpired he was only responsible for the residents of
 19 the Tower itself, not all those affected in the wider
 20 community or adjacent properties which remained the
 21 responsibility of the RBKC."
 22 Was that your understanding at the time?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. What did you understand at the time?
 25 A. Well, as I've just said, I would have thought that there

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1 were -- there was a sufficient commonality of problems
 2 afflicting residents, even though those, of course, in
 3 Grenfell Tower itself had suffered far, far more than
 4 any others, but I would have said that it needed to be
 5 managed as a totality.
 6 Q. Did it occur to you during those days -- 16th/17th,
 7 perhaps -- that John Barradell's view of his role was
 8 limited to the residents of the tower?
 9 A. Well, I mean, the astonishing -- frankly astonishing
 10 thing is that this was not a topic of conversation,
 11 a sort of currency of conversation over those days that
 12 I can recall. I mean, I can attempt to work out why
 13 that might be so, but I simply don't recall this being
 14 a matter of dialogue to the extent that I was involved
 15 in it once he had taken over.
 16 Q. Do you not recall any reporting, any feedback from
 17 people like Teresa Brown in the TMO or anybody else from
 18 the TMO coming back to you and explaining what
 19 difficulties they were having with residents who had
 20 been evacuated from the walkways?
 21 A. I do recall that at various times the groups of
 22 residents affected fluctuated, and sometimes it included
 23 the finger blocks and, of course, Grenfell Walk. What
 24 I don't remember is an interaction or an interplay
 25 between the plights of those groups of residents and the

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1 range of responsibilities being run from what turned
2 into the Westminster-owned BECC.

3 Q. Did anybody tell you things like, "We've got a problem
4 in accommodating 450 or 800 residents from the walkways
5 and we don't know where to put them, people are sleeping
6 rough"? Did anybody ever come back to you with that
7 sort of information?

8 A. Well, which days are we talking about?

9 Q. Well, 15th, 16th, 17th.

10 A. I think that we were trying to provide accommodation
11 support for people beyond the tower itself.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. But we weren't always succeeding. I think quite a lot
14 of people had to stay with friends, relatives,
15 neighbours, not in the affected buildings but nearby.

16 Q. But was there any discussion that you had with
17 John Barradell about the limits of his role once he had
18 taken over Gold?

19 A. I do not recall any discussion of that sort of issue,
20 no, I don't.

21 Q. Right. Let's come back to that in a moment.
22 In your statement you say, as we've seen, and
23 I think you've now corrected, that there was no formal
24 handover procedure to London Gold. That's paragraph 39
25 {RBK00035426/8}, as we've seen.

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1 Was there a handover?

2 A. Well, he came — I think he came, actually, about
3 8 o'clock in the morning on the Friday, and he sat in
4 on, as an observer, the first Gold meeting, and I think
5 I say in my statement that, you know, I offered him
6 the chair of the meeting, because I thought that that
7 was what was going to happen. He wanted to be
8 an observer. I thought that was absolutely fine, if
9 that was his way of finding out what we were doing and
10 not doing. Then, going on from that, we had the
11 ministerial meeting in the afternoon, and we attended
12 that by telephone as a sort of double act, I would say.

13 Q. Right.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Right. We'll get to the 10 o'clock Gold meeting on the
16 morning of 16 June in a moment.
17 Before we do, let me just ask you this: once the
18 decision to activate London Gold had been made by you,
19 is it right that, in fact, John Barradell took
20 responsibility at or from 2 o'clock in the afternoon on
21 16 June?

22 A. Well, I think that is broadly right, in the sense that
23 I was happy to, in most respects, defer to him as the
24 spokesman for local authorities when we had the meeting
25 with the Prime Minister and others on the phone.

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1 Q. Let's just go to his second statement, then,
2 {GOL00001706/15}. We can see there at paragraph 82 he
3 says:
4 "It was agreed by Nicholas that we would activate
5 the London Local Authority Gold arrangements that
6 afternoon [that's the 16th] and my records are that
7 I took on that responsibility at 1400. I am aware that
8 an email was circulated by London Resilience at 13.27
9 {GOL00000157}. The request was made by Nicholas at
10 between 1300 to 1330 on the 16th June and we dialled
11 into the Ministerial COBR meeting at 1400, where we
12 informed the group of the activation."
13 Do you agree with what he says there?

14 A. Well, we may well have had a conversation where he said,
15 "I'm taking over now", and that is how I would interpret
16 the 1.00 to 1.30 thing. But I would describe it
17 slightly differently. I think that it was his to assume
18 when he chose to do so from any time from the Thursday
19 evening phone call onwards, and my interpretation of the
20 delay from — what I saw as a delay from Thursday
21 evening to Friday lunchtime is that he thought he would
22 do a better job as London Gold via a period of
23 observation first than, in a sense, you know, leaping in
24 and having to cover both operational short-term
25 decisions, while — at the same time as doing what he

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1 had done by the Saturday morning, which is design a very
2 significant management structure for running the
3 Grenfell fire recovery taskforce or whatever it was
4 called.

5 Q. So was it his decision, the decision having been made at
6 5 pm or so on the 15th, to delay practical takeover of
7 Gold until 2 o'clock the next day?

8 A. That would be my interpretation, yes. As I say, in
9 practice, I think there is less of a difference there
10 than, you know, might appear to be so. I think he was
11 on the case. I mean, he was on the case anyway, because
12 he'd been part of the phone calls on Monday — on the
13 Wednesday and Thursday evenings, he was present in the
14 Town Hall from reasonably early on the Friday morning,
15 so to me he was assuming responsibilities and, you know,
16 if he had seen something he didn't approve of — and,
17 indeed, there was something he disapproved of in the
18 morning of that Friday — he made his views known to me.
19 So, you know, I was, in the most constructive way
20 possible, being man-marked, if you like, but he was
21 assuming understanding of and then control of the
22 recovery process.

23 Q. Right. So who was Gold? Who was occupying the Gold
24 role between 5 pm on the 15th and 2 pm on the 16th?

25 A. Well, I think, by default, it was still me.

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1 Q. It was still you, but there was -- is this right? --
 2 essentially a parallel support track offered by
 3 John Barradell from LLAG Gold during that overlap
 4 period?
 5 A. Well, he -- my interpretation of his role on the Friday
 6 morning was as observer and, when he wanted to, to
 7 comment or contribute in the course of that morning, and
 8 that was a role that I think he wanted to take in order
 9 that he could think about the future while not being
 10 overly assailed by the present. That's my
 11 interpretation .
 12 Q. Now, you may remember that on the Saturday,
 13 Nicholas Paget-Brown, the then leader, had an interview
 14 with the BBC. The programme was The World This Weekend.
 15 He is recorded as -- well, let's look at it. It's
 16 {RBK00035001/27}, paragraph 121. He says:
 17 "The scale of the tragedy was now developing
 18 additional dimensions, including the increased pressure
 19 presented by surrounding homes close to the Tower having
 20 to be evacuated, and those residents also requiring
 21 humanitarian assistance. Additionally, families and
 22 friends of residents of the Tower were arriving, seeking
 23 information about loved ones. This quickly became
 24 a crisis on a scale that London had not witnessed since
 25 the end of the War and that no local plan alone could

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1 accommodate."
 2 He told the BBC that no one borough alone would be
 3 able to cope with the scale of it, saying that:
 4 "The magnitude of this disaster on Wednesday is such
 5 that one borough alone would [not] be able to
 6 manage ..."
 7 Would you have agreed? Do you agree?
 8 A. Well, I agree now. When did the leader make the
 9 statement?
 10 Q. On the Saturday.
 11 A. Yes. Well, I think that we had all agreed by then that
 12 no one borough could have coped, even with selective
 13 reinforcement.
 14 Q. Let's then go -- and this is a slightly later document
 15 still -- to {TMO10033161/2}, second half of page 2,
 16 email to colleagues on 18 June, that's the Sunday.
 17 If you look at the email halfway down, 15.21, from
 18 you to Kevin Bartle and Tony Redpath and a number of
 19 others, including Councillor Paget-Brown, "Colleagues",
 20 it says:
 21 "As Tony Baker e-mailed yesterday, the response to
 22 the tragedy has moved into a new phase under London
 23 Local Authority Gold. The Council has recognised that
 24 the scale, the possible duration and the range of
 25 implications are such that a significantly larger and

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1 more complex response is required, drawing on officers
 2 from across London boroughs to be sustainable. There is
 3 also a growing contribution from central Government,
 4 which is also welcome even if coordination is therefore
 5 at an even greater premium."
 6 Then it goes on in the third paragraph:
 7 "The Royal Borough is a proud Council with
 8 a reputation for delivering outstanding services. It is
 9 understandable that some members of staff will feel that
 10 the new arrangements are a sign that we have failed and
 11 that others are now coming in to take over. Neither is
 12 the case. On the contrary, by calling in support we
 13 have demonstrated our ability to make the right call at
 14 the right time. Our duty now is to use our best
 15 endeavours to make the new arrangements succeed."
 16 Now, when you say there that RBKC had demonstrated
 17 its ability to make the right call at the right time,
 18 looking back on the material we've covered, that was not
 19 correct, was it?
 20 A. No, it was the right call at the wrong time, you're
 21 quite right. I think that that was -- I think it was
 22 trying to cheer people up, basically .
 23 Q. So it was what other witnesses in this Inquiry might
 24 have called puff?
 25 A. Puff, I think, is a very fair and generous assessment.

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1 Q. Yes.
 2 Let's then go to the Gold meeting on the 16th, come
 3 back to it. That's the first Council Gold meeting on
 4 that day. John Barradell was present, you say, as
 5 an observer.
 6 Did you have any conversation with John Barradell
 7 outside that meeting about the status of the response
 8 that morning and what the immediate requirements were?
 9 A. I'm sure we did talk, because I think he came about
 10 two hours earlier, so I think -- I'm sure we did, but
 11 I don't remember details of the specific conversation.
 12 Q. Now, following that meeting, I think you say that
 13 nothing changed very quickly; yes?
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. Yes, and if we go to {MOL00000036}, this was an SCG
 16 meeting at 11 o'clock that morning, so strategic
 17 co-ordination group minutes, 11 o'clock, 16 June,
 18 teleconference; you see that?
 19 A. Yeah.
 20 Q. If you go, please, to page 6 {MOL00000036/6}, you will
 21 see there the list of attendees. Do you see that there?
 22 Well, it starts on page 5 {MOL00000036/5}, in fact. But
 23 if you go there, you can see from London Resilience
 24 Group we have John Hetherington and others, and we can
 25 see that from local authorities, you and John Barradell;

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1 yes?
 2 A. Yeah.
 3 Q. Yes.
 4 Now, if you go, please, to "Any urgent business",
 5 which you'll find on page 1 {MOL0000036/1}, first item,
 6 it says:
 7 "The chair discussed what does recovery look like
 8 and the transition into this should be starting to be
 9 considered. John Barradell confirmed that this is the
 10 case. The ongoing community tensions are the reason for
 11 this change over not taking place as yet."
 12 Is that right?
 13 A. I'm not sure what that means.
 14 Q. No.
 15 Do you accept that the reason the response hadn't
 16 transferred to recovery and, as such, to be led by the
 17 local authority was because RBKC was not ready, rather
 18 than due to community tensions?
 19 A. Well, I think that we certainly weren't in a stable
 20 situation and, in that sense, you know, if what you mean
 21 by recovery is that everything is in place in support of
 22 the bereaved and the survivors, then I don't think we
 23 could claim to have reached that situation on the Friday
 24 morning. But community tensions are a reason why we
 25 escalated. Not a huge reason, but one reason amongst

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1 several.
 2 Q. If you go to page 2 {MOL0000036/2}, under the heading
 3 "Local Authority", the first bullet point says:
 4 "General community feeling is of hurt and anger.
 5 This is being stoked by a small number of known local
 6 instigators who continue to fabricate stories in order
 7 to further their aims."
 8 What was that about?
 9 A. I think it was a suspicion that in amongst a great deal
 10 of completely genuine and justified criticism, it was
 11 within the scope of a handful of people, who were all
 12 the time, well before the fire, extremely antagonistic
 13 to the council, to make matters even worse. I think we
 14 thought something of that was going on, but we did not
 15 know, and there was nothing that we could sensibly do
 16 about it, even if it were true.
 17 Q. Was there a slight sense, at least, that these comments
 18 perhaps unfairly sought to deflect attention away from
 19 the failings of the council's response in the immediate
 20 aftermath?
 21 A. No, I think that we were -- by then we were perfectly
 22 all too well aware that we were not doing anything like
 23 the quality of job that we thought we should be and that
 24 I thought was feasible on the Wednesday.
 25 Q. Now, can I ask you one or two questions about the TMO at

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1 this point.
 2 Can we go to {RBK00010176}. This is an email thread
 3 on 16 June, earlier on in the day, and it contains
 4 an email from Barbara Brownlee in the second half of
 5 your screen there on page 1, and she is from Westminster
 6 City Council, and it's forwarded through the BECC at
 7 RBKC to Laura Johnson and Stuart Priestley, as you can
 8 see from the top email on the screen.
 9 Looking at that second email down, Barbara Brownlee
 10 says this:
 11 "There are currently unofficial calls for
 12 assistance ..."
 13 I'm sorry, I should time this. It's 11.51 on
 14 16 June. So this is at a time between the two meetings,
 15 between the Gold meeting and the strategic co-ordination
 16 group meeting, and it says:
 17 "There are currently unofficial calls for
 18 assistance, coming from K&C's TMO for help. They have
 19 used what's app to send out a message to some London
 20 councils saying that their staff are exhausted and they
 21 need resources on for the weekend.
 22 "I also now have emails from housing consultancies
 23 saying the same thing.
 24 "This is a disorganised and very unofficial way to
 25 raise help after we have been offering it since the very

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1 beginning.
 2 "I am concerned that too many inexperienced staff
 3 [will] descend upon the respite centres without any
 4 planning and simply make the situation worse.
 5 "Please can you raise with K&C BEC.
 6 "Thanks
 7 "Barbara."
 8 Now, if we then go to {RBK0001923}, Amanda Johnson,
 9 you can see, responds to Barbara Brownlee on
 10 20 June 2017 at 12.58, copying you in. I say copying
 11 you in; she forwards it to you. She says:
 12 "Barbara
 13 "At this morning's meeting you explained that
 14 resources would not be made available to support the TMO
 15 in terms of housing management staff.
 16 "The TMO is now struggling to mobilise staff to
 17 support people back into their homes (I am clarifying
 18 the number of staff that have not attended work today).
 19 Staff are extremely frightened and the lack of staff
 20 will significantly undermine our ability to get people
 21 back into their homes, accelerating already heightened
 22 tensions.
 23 "The London Wide response has been extremely helpful
 24 in supporting RBKC and I am struggling to see why this
 25 cannot be extended to the TMO, as there is a direct

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1 impact on our tenants and staff safety.
 2 "Can you please raise this with GOLD?"
 3 Then at the top of the page, as you can see,
 4 Amanda Johnson sends this to Laura Johnson and you the
 5 same day. This is the 20th now, so we're now at the
 6 Tuesday:
 7 "I am really quite concerned about GOLD's response --
 8 please see below."
 9 Now, as I say, this is some days after the 16th, but
 10 when did you first learn of this problem, this problem
 11 about the TMO struggling to mobilise staff to assist
 12 evacuated residents from the walkways?
 13 A. I'm sorry, I just don't remember when that would have --
 14 when I would have learnt of that. Plainly I would have
 15 learnt of it through this email.
 16 Q. Yes.
 17 A. But I wouldn't have -- I don't remember knowing of it
 18 before this email.
 19 Q. Who would you have expected to brief you if there had
 20 been a problem with the London Gold resources not
 21 extending far enough so as to be able to assist the TMO
 22 in their role?
 23 A. Well, I think that -- I mean, London Gold was in charge
 24 of a lot of RBKC staff by, at the very latest, the
 25 Saturday morning, and any of them could have noticed --

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1 I mean, I suppose it's more obviously going to be
 2 housing staff than others, but any of them could have
 3 said, "There is a mismatch here, you know, isn't this
 4 going to be a big problem?"
 5 Q. Do you know why this was a problem?
 6 A. Why the failure of TMO staff to turn up and so on?
 7 Q. Well, why resources weren't being made available from
 8 London Gold to assist TMO?
 9 A. Well, it looks as though this is a further example of
 10 the issue that Gold -- London Gold interpreted their
 11 role as being just that of the tower as opposed to
 12 associated problems on the wider estate.
 13 Q. Right. Did you learn that or did you have that
 14 perception during the first seven days after the event?
 15 A. No.
 16 Q. You didn't?
 17 A. No.
 18 Q. Can I then turn to the ministerial visit to the Westway.
 19 Do you remember that on the morning of 16 June, the
 20 Friday, there was a visit at 9 am at the Westway from
 21 the Secretary of State at the DCLG, who was by then
 22 Sajid Javid? Do you remember that?
 23 A. I think I knew that he did visit that day, yes.
 24 Q. You weren't in attendance, I think.
 25 A. No, no.

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1 Q. Why did he visit? Or, rather, why were you not there?
 2 A. It may just be that I wasn't invited. I think the
 3 leader of the council was there, or if he -- I'd be
 4 quite surprised if either the leader or deputy leader of
 5 the council weren't there, and if they weren't there, it
 6 might have been almost a deliberate act on the part of
 7 the Secretary of State. But I would have thought either
 8 the leader or deputy leader would have been there.
 9 Q. Right. I mean, my question was: did you decide not to
 10 go or did you not learn that there was to be a visit?
 11 A. I think I knew of the visit, but I think my high
 12 priority that morning was to help John.
 13 Q. Right. Did somebody decide you shouldn't be there or
 14 did you decide not to go?
 15 A. I don't remember deciding not to be there. I think
 16 I had a prior engagement, in effect.
 17 Q. Now, those from the department who attended the meeting
 18 at the Westway included Jo Farrar, and she was critical
 19 about, among other things, the absence of senior RBKC
 20 officers at the rest centre. That's how she observed
 21 it. Do you have anything to say about that?
 22 A. Well, I accept her criticism. I think she's probably
 23 right, and I think it was an issue for much of the --
 24 for much of this period that we under-resourced the
 25 coverage of the Westway as a -- as the management of

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1 a centre.
 2 Q. Should you have attended and given assurances to central
 3 government or perhaps asked central government for
 4 further assistance?
 5 A. I think that is something that they could have done.
 6 They could have rounded up some civil servants and said,
 7 "Please make sense of or support the council's services
 8 in these respects at this location", yeah, I think that
 9 would have been feasible.
 10 Q. Do you remember having a meeting with Jo Farrar a little
 11 bit later that morning, at about noon, at the Town Hall?
 12 A. I don't remember that.
 13 Q. You don't.
 14 Let's go to {CLG00030414/16}, what I'm showing you
 15 is Dr Jo Farrar's statement, and if we go to page 16 in
 16 it, please, paragraph 78, she says at the foot of the
 17 page:
 18 "I went to see Nicholas Holgate as planned and was
 19 surprised that he was not available to see me. I had to
 20 wait for some time. When I was shown to his office,
 21 John Barradell was present and in discussion with
 22 Nicholas Holgate."
 23 Pausing there, does that accord with your
 24 recollection?
 25 A. I don't remember this meeting, but of course, you know,

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1 if she says it occurred, it occurred, you know.
 2 Q. Right. Then she goes on:
 3 "My recollection is that John stated he was there to
 4 support Nicholas Holgate, and that there would be
 5 a Chief Executive rota as part of the London Resilience
 6 arrangements."
 7 Do you remember John Barradell telling Jo Farrar
 8 that?
 9 A. No.
 10 Q. Then she says:
 11 "I did not think this sounded sensible and felt we
 12 needed an experienced person to be in the lead, rather
 13 than in support."
 14 Do you remember any discussion around that or about
 15 that?
 16 A. No, but it does make sense, given the ministry's opening
 17 statement that they were very pleased that he had agreed
 18 to become the London Gold.
 19 Q. Was the original position in fact that John Barradell
 20 was going to support you, rather than to lead the
 21 response, albeit in a limited way?
 22 A. I think there are two different things: there's
 23 an invocation of London Gold and then there is who that
 24 London Gold might be and how quickly someone would be in
 25 place, and I had made the assumption, given his

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1 appearance, that it was him.
 2 Q. Did the intended position change in any way after this
 3 meeting with Jo Farrar?
 4 A. Well, I mean, according to John's own account, he took
 5 up the role at 2 o'clock.
 6 Q. Yes, but did he only take the role up at 2 o'clock as
 7 a result of Jo Farrar's intervention?
 8 A. That is a possible interpretation. I accept that that
 9 could be such, but I was expecting him to have done
 10 that.
 11 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Can you just help me with this:
 12 I get the impression from a number of answers you have
 13 given that you were under the impression — rightly or
 14 wrongly, I don't actually know — that whoever was
 15 London Gold as a result of the invocation of the
 16 arrangements had some right to come in and take over
 17 from you.
 18 A. Yes.
 19 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: And that was your understanding of
 20 the arrangement?
 21 A. Absolutely, Mr Chairman, yeah.
 22 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, thank you very much.
 23 MR MILLETT: Let's go to {RBK00028809}. This is an email
 24 from John Hetherington, deputy head of London Resilience
 25 at the time, at 13.27 to all local authority chief

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1 executives, and you can see it's sent on behalf of
 2 John Barradell and you, and he confirms this. He says:
 3 "Good afternoon,
 4 "Following a request from RB Kensington and Chelsea
 5 for strategic support due to the increasing complexity
 6 and severity of the Grenfell Tower fire the London Local
 7 Authority Gold operations have been activated. This is
 8 to ensure that London Local Government collectively
 9 supports RBK&C during these extremely challenging times.
 10 "John Barradell is supporting RBK&C and will be
 11 supported by further Chief Executives as required, those
 12 Chief Executives are aware and on standby."
 13 Is that a correct summary or summation of matters as
 14 you understood them at that time, 13.27 on 16 June?
 15 A. Well, I mean, I think it is phrased sort of delicately
 16 or circumspectly. I think that it is actually
 17 a reasonably enough clear implication of this that John
 18 is really in charge, and, if you like, the giveaway is,
 19 "John Barradell is supporting RBK&C", which is a polite
 20 way of putting it, "and will be supported by further
 21 Chief Executives as required, those Chief Executives are
 22 aware and on standby". I'm afraid that to me is
 23 a tactful way of saying London Gold is in charge.
 24 Q. Why was the tact necessary?
 25 A. I think probably they thought it might be offensive or

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1 embarrassing or something just to say, "We've had to
 2 shoulder RBKC aside and, you know, get a grip". But
 3 that is, I think, what they are really saying.
 4 Q. Let's then turn to the post—activation period from
 5 2 o'clock on 16 June.
 6 What was your role once John Barradell took up the
 7 reins at 2 o'clock?
 8 A. Well, I think to facilitate and to — you know, if he
 9 wanted something or he wanted clarity over who in
 10 the council was doing such and such a thing, then that
 11 would be — I would be one of the people who would help
 12 him do that.
 13 Q. Is it fair to say that you considered your role to
 14 entail significantly fewer actions in relation to those
 15 leading the response from 17 June onwards?
 16 A. Well, even from the 16th.
 17 Q. Or from the afternoon of the 16th.
 18 A. Yeah.
 19 Q. I think it's right that RBKC did not participate in any
 20 of the strategic co—ordination meetings from 18 June
 21 until 20 June.
 22 A. That's probably true, yes, I can't remember.
 23 Q. You say in your statement — it's paragraph 46 at page 9
 24 {RBK00035426/9} — that by 17 June, that's the Saturday,
 25 you were to:

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1 " ... look after logistics in RBKC. Several knew
2 better how to handle the situation than I did and ...
3 I agreed there was a need to demonstrate a renewed
4 effort ."
5 When was it that you first realised that?
6 A. What, the fact that we needed to ---
7 Q. Yes.
8 A. Where are we?
9 Q. Can we go to your statement, please, at paragraph 46 on
10 page 9 {RBK00035426/9}. Let me just show you the exact
11 word you used. In the last sentence you say:
12 "Several knew better how to handle the situation
13 than I did and they and I agreed that there was a need
14 to demonstrate a renewed effort."
15 When did that need first occur to you?
16 A. Well, I thought the implication of London Gold taking
17 over was that there would be significant input from
18 numerous other London boroughs, and that this --- as it
19 were, there needed to be quite a different scale, let
20 alone look and feel, to the local authority presence in
21 North Kensington.
22 Q. In terms of how RBKC communications with the public were
23 controlled after this point, what was it that changed in
24 any way by the activation of LA Gold?
25 A. Well, I think by the Saturday, first of all , our head of

1 media and communications had resigned, and secondly ---
2 Q. Was that Martin Fitzpatrick?
3 A. Indeed.
4 Q. Right.
5 A. And, secondly, I think that John had looked to
6 Julia Corkey, who was the head of communications at
7 Westminster, to be on point for how the Grenfell
8 recovery taskforce would communicate with any audience,
9 notably residents of North Kensington.
10 Q. Right. Why had Martin Fitzpatrick resigned?
11 A. I think that it is a very delicate matter and a matter
12 of considerable sadness that I think that he felt that
13 he could not cope, to put it politely .
14 Q. Were you aware that the Prime Minister spoke with the
15 leader of the council on the evening of 16 June 2017?
16 A. I probably was aware, because I would imagine that the
17 leader would have shared that with me, but I don't
18 remember the import of what she said.
19 Q. Right.
20 Can we look at {RBK00021098}. This is an email from
21 Lorna Gratton, the second email down, to Sue Redmond on
22 Saturday, 17 June at 6.03 pm, as you can see. We looked
23 at this with Sue Redmond when she gave evidence ---
24 A. Yes.
25 Q. --- earlier this week.

1 See page 2 {RBK00021098/2}, if you can go to that,
2 please. She says there on page 2, under "Specific
3 requests from residents":
4 "Council should proactively contact Clement James
5 Centre representatives (To note: PM requested the
6 council leader to make contact with all mosques,
7 churches and temples by end of day Friday when she spoke
8 to him on Friday evening --- this doesn't appear to have
9 been done)."
10 Were you aware of that? Were you aware of the
11 Prime Minister's command?
12 A. I don't think I was.
13 Q. Right.
14 Were you aware of whether any proactive contact was
15 made with the Clement James Centre and the other faith
16 centres listed here?
17 A. I think it's quite likely that the councillors will have
18 been doing that, not necessarily in response to the
19 Prime Minister, but I'm sure they will have been all the
20 keener to do so given her instruction . I mean, the
21 leader had been on the board of management or something
22 like the board of management of the Al Manaar Mosque,
23 and I think there was another councillor on the board at
24 that time, and I think there were quite good links
25 between councillors and a number of the bodies that she

1 would have had in mind. So ---
2 Q. But this is Number 10 telling your HALO that the
3 Prime Minister had made a specific request to
4 the council leader to make contact with these faith
5 groups and places and it hadn't been done. Can you
6 account for that?
7 A. No. But, as I say, I think that it is quite likely that
8 councillors had been in contact with some of them and
9 there were already links , for example between the leader
10 of the council and the Al Manaar Mosque, so it may well
11 be that they thought they were in compliance with this,
12 even if they weren't quoting her instruction to do so.
13 Q. Right.
14 Can we go to {CAB00006343}, where I think we see an
15 email about the call that the leader had had with the
16 Prime Minister on the Friday evening, 16 June. This is
17 from Alastair Whitehead to a number of others, including
18 Lorna Gratton and Gavin Barwell, as you can see, and
19 it's cc "Private Office Support Team". "READOUT", is
20 the subject, "Prime Minister call with Leader of
21 Kensington and Chelsea Council":
22 "All,
23 "The Prime Minister called the Leader of Kensington
24 and Chelsea Council this evening --- herewith a readout."
25 Then the first bullet :

1 "The PM reported that, from her visit, the
 2 overwhelming message from those affected was that there
 3 had been no communication from the Council, and people
 4 didn't feel that the Council was coordinating things
 5 properly."
 6 Now, just pausing there, was that a fair
 7 observation?
 8 A. Well, I mean, I think communications had been poor,
 9 absolutely right, and I think that our co-ordination was
 10 poor, I think that is true, but I would say that I think
 11 that we were beginning to maintain -- working out how to
 12 maintain regular contact with survivors of the fire.
 13 Q. Working it out two days later?
 14 A. Well, if I recall correctly, there had been attempts to
 15 visit people for whom we had found accommodation on the
 16 Thursday, but quite often, for very understandable
 17 reasons, appointments had not been kept. So, I mean,
 18 I think we were trying to do the right thing for those
 19 most severely affected, even as -- I mean, it's not
 20 early, but even as soon as the Thursday.
 21 Q. Then the second bullet point:
 22 "Leader reported there had been a big response from
 23 the voluntary sector, and that Council officers were
 24 engaged -- but there had been some confusion and the
 25 Council is not held in the highest regard."

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1 Was that something of an understatement?
 2 A. Well, I think it is true by the Friday evening that that
 3 was so, yes.
 4 Q. Now, can we go, please, to {RBK00068075}, finally. This
 5 is a report which was commissioned and created by
 6 the council after your departure, and it captured -- or
 7 purported to capture, at least -- the learning from the
 8 Grenfell Tower fire, and members of staff from across
 9 the council were invited to respond.
 10 A. Mm--hm.
 11 Q. If we go, please, to page 13 {RBK00068075/13} at
 12 annex A, we can see some of the comments, and two-thirds
 13 of the way down the page:
 14 "Theme: Leadership."
 15 Do you see that?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. It says:
 18 "The majority of comments focussed on the lack of
 19 direction and visibility of senior management
 20 immediately after the fire. Some comments indicated
 21 that this may have hindered the ability to provide an
 22 efficient, co-ordinated response to residents."
 23 Then there are some quotations from what people have
 24 said:
 25 "' ... a sense of panic prevailed. Needed some

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1 clear positive and calm leadership.'
 2 "'Senior leadership across the council seemed slow
 3 to co-ordinate action and make decisions. This meant
 4 that frontline staff were struggling to get answers to
 5 support questions or faced different responses depending
 6 who they talked to.'
 7 "'An immediate response on the ground. I felt it
 8 took too long to be deployed by which time we had lost
 9 the trust of the residents and community. Lack of
 10 leaders to send staff out in the first few hours.'"
 11 Now, is there anything that you would say to those
 12 comments? Would you say they were fair or would you say
 13 they were unjustified?
 14 A. Well, I'm sure there is justice in all of them. I don't
 15 think that there was a sense of panic prevalent
 16 throughout the period. I'm sure there were at least
 17 moments of panic or examples of panic, but I don't think
 18 that was true, as it were, ordinarily through those
 19 early days. I think that there were positive and calm
 20 members of senior management. So, you know, there was
 21 some, there may not have been enough of that. We may
 22 have been slow on occasion.
 23 I think that it is fair to say that there was, as
 24 I said earlier, a long gap between people having to
 25 evacuate the tower and then the council providing

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1 a source of assistance, and that is, I think, very
 2 difficult to overcome given the state of arrangements
 3 even if the council had been -- had had more people in
 4 the borough emergency control centre and even if we'd
 5 had more training. Actually, there was a problem there
 6 of geography which was not easy to overcome at all at
 7 that time of day.
 8 Q. Finally, can I show you {LFB00061161}. This is
 9 a Cabinet Office document entitled, "The role of Local
 10 Resilience Forums: A reference document", and you can
 11 see at the bottom left-hand corner that it bears the
 12 date of July 2013.
 13 Just looking at the first page, is this a document
 14 with which you were familiar during your time as chief
 15 executive, do you think?
 16 A. I wouldn't be sure.
 17 Q. No. Well, let's look at page 53 {LFB00061161/53}.
 18 These are the principles about recovery at
 19 paragraph 123, and if you look at the last bullet point
 20 on that page, it says this:
 21 "Recovery management is best approached from the
 22 perspective of community development and is most
 23 effective when conducted at a local level, with the
 24 active participation of the affected community and
 25 a strong reliance on local capacities and expertise.

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1 Recovery is not just a matter for the statutory agencies
 2 – the private sector, the voluntary sector and the wider
 3 community will play a crucial role.”
 4 Then over the page {LFB00061161/54}:
 5 " ■ Recovery management is most effective when
 6 agencies involved in human welfare have a major role in
 7 all levels of decision—making which may influence the
 8 well—being and recovery of the affected community.
 9 " ■ Recovery is best achieved where the recovery
 10 process begins from the moment the emergency is
 11 identified . It is recommended that, if resources allow,
 12 the RCG is set up on the first day of the emergency.”
 13 I won't ask you what the acronym stands for.
 14 Then:
 15 "Recovery planning and management arrangements are
 16 most effective where they are supported by training
 17 programmes and exercises which ensure that the agencies
 18 and groups involved in the recovery process are properly
 19 prepared for their role.”
 20 I think RCG is a recovery co—ordination group, but
 21 I' ll be corrected about that if that's wrong.
 22 Then:
 23 "Recovery is most effective where recovery
 24 management arrangements provide a comprehensive and
 25 integrated framework for managing all potential

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1 emergencies and where assistance measures are provided
 2 in a timely, fair and equitable manner and are
 3 sufficiently flexible to respond to a diversity of
 4 community needs.”
 5 Now, my first question is: were you familiar with
 6 those principles, even if not specifically this
 7 document, before June 2017?
 8 A. I think I was familiar with the idea of the recovery
 9 process beginning from the moment the emergency is
 10 identified .
 11 Q. Right.
 12 A. Yes, I think I would have been familiar with those
 13 principles , yeah.
 14 Q. Had you systems in place whereby you were approaching
 15 preparedness from the perspective of community
 16 development?
 17 A. I think we would — I think I would struggle to ... no.
 18 I would struggle to say that we were ready to engage or
 19 develop with the community in the recovery from the
 20 tragedy.
 21 Q. Did it matter, was it relevant, that key directors like
 22 Sue Redmond and Laura Johnson had no developed training
 23 on contingency management and no understanding of the
 24 services available from the LLAG?
 25 A. Yes, I' m sure it does matter.

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1 Q. Yes.
 2 Do you accept that there was insufficient training ,
 3 especially in relation to the humanitarian aspects of
 4 recovery?
 5 A. Yes, I do. Though I would like to add a rider that
 6 I think that, with hindsight, on a tragedy of this
 7 scale, actually probably the training would need to go
 8 rather further than even a compliant authority might
 9 have imagined necessary.
 10 Q. Did you or anybody in the council ever take steps to
 11 examine the systems you had in place, examine these
 12 principles , which involve preparedness and engagement
 13 with the community, and satisfy yourself that the
 14 systems you had in place were compliant with the
 15 requirements of the Equality Act 2010?
 16 A. I think we might have thought that, although relations
 17 in North Kensington were not as good as in the rest of
 18 the borough, I think we might have thought that the
 19 sense of partnership we had with community bodies there
 20 would have formed a basis for recovery, were a disaster
 21 to occur. I don't think that adds up to what you said,
 22 but I do think it would have been, and in other
 23 circumstances it could have been, a good place to start.
 24 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 25 Mr Chairman, those are all my prepared questions.

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1 I have got a clutch of other questions which I think
 2 I will have to put to Mr Holgate perhaps after the
 3 break, because they may go with further questions that
 4 may come in.
 5 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Yes.
 6 Well, Mr Holgate, even though counsel has reached
 7 the end of what he thinks are his prepared questions, we
 8 have to have a break at this point to give him a chance
 9 to check he has not left anything out.
 10 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 11 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Equally importantly, we have to give
 12 an opportunity for those who are following the
 13 proceedings from elsewhere to suggest questions which
 14 maybe we should put to you. So we will stop now and
 15 have a ten—minute break. We will come back at 4.40, and
 16 at that point we' ll see whether there are any more
 17 questions for you.
 18 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
 19 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right? And again, please don't
 20 talk to anyone about your evidence.
 21 THE WITNESS: Certainly.
 22 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: Thank you very much. Would you go
 23 with the usher, please.
 24 (Pause)
 25 Thank you, Mr Millett. 4.40, then, please.

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1 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 2 (4.30 pm)
 3 (A short break)
 4 (4.43 pm)
 5 SIR MARTIN MOORE—BICK: All right, Mr Holgate. Well, let's
 6 see if there are any more questions for you.
 7 Yes, Mr Millett.
 8 MR MILLETT: Yes, Mr Chairman, just one or two.
 9 First, can we just look at the [draft] transcript
 10 for this morning, please, page 43, line 19 and 20
 11 {Day273/48:12–19}. I was asking you at line 19 why you
 12 remember it was 4.30 particularly, and you said that:
 13 " ... I was busy on email and the phone for a while.
 14 I had retrieved the copy of the emergency plan in the
 15 flat, and then after a while my wife got up and we
 16 agreed that it would be a very sensible thing to go and
 17 look at the circumstances around Grenfell Tower. So we
 18 probably set off around 4.00, something like that."
 19 Did you take your wife down there?
 20 A. Well, she took me down there because I don't drive.
 21 Q. Right, I see. All right.
 22 Why was it a topic of discussion about whether you
 23 would go down there and look at the circumstances? What
 24 lies behind my question is: was it not obvious that you
 25 should?

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1 A. Well, I think it was. It was more a case of when and
 2 how. Yeah.
 3 Q. What did you expect to learn by going to the scene?
 4 A. I wanted some impression of the activity around the
 5 rest centres in particular, and some idea of what the
 6 environment felt like, not just the tower, but the
 7 sort of environment around the tower, and I didn't
 8 really know what to expect, and I thought that some
 9 sort of first-hand exposure was sensible because I was
 10 conscious — as I said also this morning, I was
 11 conscious of the expectation that Gold didn't stray far
 12 from the BECC thereafter, so it was probably the only
 13 opportunity to have some sense for myself of what was
 14 happening.
 15 Q. Right.
 16 Next question, next topic.
 17 Was there any discussion at any stage of ringfencing
 18 a part of the budget so that you always had a sure fund
 19 to be able to pay for the right number of staff and the
 20 right number of trained staff who could respond across
 21 the whole field of London Resilience if called upon?
 22 A. I don't remember anything of that nature. It sounds
 23 like a perfectly good idea. I think it might founder on
 24 boroughs' autonomy. So, of course, the fire may have
 25 made quite a big difference to how boroughs plan to

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1 co-operate together in future, but if you had put such
 2 a thing forward before the fire, you might have found
 3 quite a bit of resistance to borough funds being
 4 pre-empted or presumed by some entity beyond the
 5 boroughs themselves.
 6 Q. Now, I asked you earlier in your evidence about the
 7 reasons for not invoking London Gold on the morning of
 8 14 June, and one of the things you said was that the
 9 housing department was going to work as a department
 10 pretty much entirely on the task to reach survivors.
 11 Did you discuss with Laura Johnson that question?
 12 A. I'd discussed what she thought we could do. I think
 13 I had a telephone conversation with her even before we
 14 both got to the Town Hall.
 15 Q. Right. Did you explore with Laura Johnson what her
 16 understanding of the LLAG system was?
 17 A. No.
 18 Q. And what about with Sue Redmond, who became the HALO?
 19 Did you discuss with her —
 20 A. I don't believe — I don't recall doing so.
 21 Q. Right.
 22 Was one of your errors in proceeding without calling
 23 in LLAG Gold at an earlier point not properly testing
 24 with those two individuals, at least, and perhaps other
 25 executive officers, whether they were equipped to cope?

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1 A. Yes, I think that's a very fair point indeed. What
 2 I should have done — I mean, really I should have done
 3 something like that as soon as realistically possible,
 4 and, failing that, I could have done it adjacent to the
 5 Gold meeting at 11 o'clock.
 6 Q. Now, I haven't asked you about David Kerry.
 7 Was it your impression, at least by the 14th, later
 8 on the 14th — he had gone home, but when he came
 9 back on the 14th — that he was, I think as he put it,
 10 really zonked and inoperable?
 11 A. I wouldn't have formed that impression, no. I think
 12 I was aware that he — obviously I was aware that he had
 13 been up most of the night and I accepted his decision to
 14 hand over to others mid-morning. So — and I appreciate
 15 from my own point of view I would not necessarily have
 16 got much sleep in the course of the day, so it wouldn't
 17 have surprised me if he wasn't feeling on top form by
 18 that evening. But, as a practitioner of long standing,
 19 I might have expected him to say, "I can't do this", or,
 20 "I need someone else to come and do it with me", or
 21 something like that. I don't recall him saying that he
 22 felt unequal to that challenge.
 23 Q. Both Rebecca Blackburn and Sue Redmond in their evidence
 24 have referred to raising concerns with you and
 25 Tony Redpath about David Kerry. Do you recall that?

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1 A. Again, as ever, if they say that, I'm sure they did
 2 that. I don't think either of them would have had the
 3 chance to do that on the 14th. They may well have had
 4 the chance to do so later.
 5 Q. Did you come to a view that David Kerry was really
 6 incapable in the circumstances of running the BECC as
 7 Silver?
 8 A. No.
 9 Q. Right.
 10 Do you remember whether you were asked by
 11 Rebecca Blackburn about Gold and by Redmond about the
 12 need for structure? Do you remember being addressed by
 13 them on those topics?
 14 A. No, but I'm more than happy to assume that they are
 15 right.
 16 Q. Did you feel that you were receiving sufficient support
 17 and advice, reliable advice, from those in the
 18 contingency department within the council during those
 19 first two days?
 20 A. I think that it is very hard to know what you could
 21 reasonably expect of a not very large group of people
 22 operating under considerable stress in unprecedented
 23 circumstances, and, if I may say so, I do not think that
 24 another training exercise or two would have clarified
 25 that situation. I think there is a very considerable

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1 difference between training and practice on the one
 2 hand -- however sensible and however necessary they are,
 3 and they would have made a difference -- and the
 4 actuality of something like the Grenfell Tower fire.
 5 Q. Finally, do you accept, having seen the evidence that we
 6 have been going through together, that at least
 7 an aspect of your reluctance to invoke LLAG Gold until
 8 late Thursday the 15th was that it would have been
 9 politically damaging to the council?
 10 A. No, I don't accept that, actually. I don't think --
 11 again, it comes back to a hugely obvious and important
 12 distinction between substance and presentation. You
 13 know, in the Treasury, in the DCMS, in the local
 14 authority until then, I was always about the substance.
 15 If I'd thought that RBKC could not cope, then it would
 16 have been madness to have carried on just because it was
 17 embarrassing to admit as much. It would -- you know,
 18 that would not -- that is not part of my make-up.
 19 Q. Looking back on it now, and based on what you know now
 20 and the evidence we have examined together over the past
 21 day of your evidence, is there anything in your role
 22 that you would have done differently, Mr Holgate?
 23 A. Yes. Well, we've spent most of the day, really,
 24 exploring that. So the most obvious thing should have
 25 been to have activated London Gold more or less at 3.20

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1 on the Wednesday morning.
 2 Failing that, as Laura Johnson said yesterday, to
 3 have paid more attention to what the council was trying
 4 to communicate and, if necessary, to shut out the
 5 reactive work that absorbed, I think, too much time of
 6 the media team and to have focused on proactive work.
 7 And I should, of course, even having made the first
 8 mistake of not invoking London Gold straight away,
 9 I should have got on with the humanitarian assistance on
 10 the Wednesday as well.
 11 I mean, those are just the headlines. I think there
 12 is more besides that one could list.
 13 Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to add to
 14 your evidence that perhaps I haven't covered with you
 15 that perhaps would help us with our investigations?
 16 A. Well, again, with the benefit of hindsight, I think
 17 that -- and if you'll forgive me reverting to the
 18 sort of policy analyst in the civil service that I once
 19 was, I think that the ability to deal to the quality
 20 that we would all want, our ability to address the needs
 21 of the survivors, the bereaved and others after
 22 a tragedy of this scale, would require an intensity and
 23 an extent of preparation which to me in all probability
 24 goes well beyond what was then expected even of
 25 a compliant authority. And I may be wrong about that,

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1 because I've been wrong about quite a lot, but I think
 2 that is true.
 3 To take just one example, I'm very glad, for
 4 the council's sake, that they now have two tests a year
 5 instead of one, but I wonder whether those tests are
 6 done without warning, for example. And running
 7 full-scale tests without warning is a major call, and
 8 would obviously involve foregoing service to other
 9 customers of the council during the period over which
 10 you would run such a thing, but that is the kind of
 11 choice that I think authorities in the aftermath of the
 12 Grenfell fire have to confront and have to be explicit
 13 about what they are aiming to achieve and the standards
 14 they expect to set themselves, and I don't think that
 15 was the case before the fire.
 16 MR MILLETT: Thank you.
 17 Well, Mr Holgate, I've come to the end of all of my
 18 questions, and it only remains for me to thank you very
 19 much for coming to the Inquiry and assisting us with our
 20 investigations. We are extremely grateful to you. So
 21 thank you.
 22 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
 23 May I say how profoundly sorry I am to the survivors
 24 and the bereaved and other residents for the fire itself
 25 and for the failures of the council to cope in the

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1 aftermath in the way that it would have expected of
2 itself under any other circumstance. I am profoundly
3 sorry.
4 Thank you.
5 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Well, thank you, Mr Holgate. It's
6 right that I should add the thanks of the panel to those
7 expressed by Mr Millett. It's been very helpful to us
8 to hear what you have to tell us about how you tried to
9 handle things in the days immediately following the
10 fire. It's been not only interesting but very useful,
11 and we are very grateful to you for coming to give us
12 your evidence. So thank you very much indeed.
13 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
14 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: And now, of course, you're free to
15 go.
16 THE WITNESS: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.
17 (The witness withdrew)
18 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Well, thank you, Mr Millett. That's
19 all for today, and we shall resume on Monday morning at
20 10 o'clock with another witness.
21 MR MILLETT: Yes, Mr Chairman.
22 Can I express our gratitude to the panel for sitting
23 late on a Thursday evening, and also to the transcriber
24 and to the Opus operators for doing the same. We're
25 very grateful to you for the accommodation.

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1 Yes, Monday morning, TMO witnesses.
2 SIR MARTIN MOORE–BICK: Thank you very much. You're quite
3 right to thank them, because we can't operate without
4 the support of all those who deal with the technical
5 side of things. So I'm very glad we were able to finish
6 Mr Holgate's evidence today, and thank you all of you
7 who were prepared to sit late to do that.
8 Very good. 10 o'clock on Monday morning, then,
9 please.
10 (4.56 pm)
11 (The hearing adjourned until 10 am
12 on Monday, 9 May 2022)

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