

**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT**  
Wednesday 12 December 2018

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*From transcript of 12 December 2018:*

In Phase 1, we're seeking to establish in some detail what happened at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, so that in Phase 2 we can focus our attention on the critical circumstances and decisions which enabled such a devastating event to occur. I am pleased to confirm that work on Phase 2 has already been going on for several months.

Those who lost friends and relations, those who lived in the tower and lost both their homes and everything they owned, and those who lived close to the tower and were directly affected by the fire, all want to know how it was possible for a disaster of this kind to occur. But before we can answer that question, we need to understand in some detail the course of events, so that in Phase 2 we can ask the right questions of the right people.

In the course of doing that, we may also be able to confirm or dispel some of the rumours and suspicions which have surrounded the events of that night.

This Inquiry is unlike any other in the number of core participants and, I would suggest, in the scope and complexity of the evidence it has considered and will yet have to consider.

There are currently a total of 598 core participants, of whom 568 are individuals, 10 are government or institution bodies of one kind or another, and 20 are commercial bodies.

Over the last 12 months, the Inquiry team has collected, sifted and disclosed over 20,000 documents not including the many witness statements we've also received. All those documents had to be checked for relevance and to ensure that no personal data was inadvertently disclosed in contravention of the Data Protection legislation. Those documents which have been referred to in the course of the hearings have been published on the Inquiry's website, and we shall continue to publish fresh documents in that way as appropriate after first informing the core participants of our intention to do so.

The Inquiry has received 668 statements from firefighters. Most were from members of the London Fire Brigade, but some were from other regional fire and rescue services which provided assistance on the night in question. It has heard oral evidence from 88 of those witnesses, including firefighters, control room officers and officers of the London Fire Brigade, including the Commissioner herself and other senior officers. Statements from 262 individual fire and rescue personnel have been read into the record.

The Inquiry has received 307 witness statements from a total of 275 Bereaved, Survivors and Residents, for which I am particularly grateful, knowing how difficult it must have been for many of them to describe their harrowing experiences. 35 Bereaved, Survivors and Residents gave oral evidence, often in very moving terms. A total of 266 witness statements – that's 47 from bereaved, friends and relatives, 150 from survivors and residents of the tower, 68 from residents of the walkways and 1 from a relative of someone who survived - have been read into the record and form part of the evidence before the Inquiry. The Inquiry has also received statements from representatives of the Metropolitan Police Service, the London Ambulance Service and others who were present on the night.

The Inquiry has also had the benefit of hearing from many expert witnesses, all of whom are leading authorities in their fields. They have examined the tower and the remains of some of the equipment found within it. They have provided the Inquiry with detailed reports containing their findings and expert opinions based on them. They have given evidence in person to explain their opinions and have responded to questions directed to them.

Public hearings began in May this year with the commemoration hearings held at the Millennium Hotel, which brought those who died in the fire to the fore. Those hearings have ensured that they will never be lost from sight and amid the many issues of a technical nature with which the Inquiry inevitably has to grapple. The commemoration hearings were followed by several weeks of hearings here at Holborn Bars, which started at the beginning of June and have continued with occasional breaks until today. As a result, the Inquiry has sat to take evidence and to hear opening and closing statements for a total of nearly 100 days.

I am very grateful to all those who have given evidence to the Inquiry, whether in the form of written statements or in person at the hearings, despite the difficulties many of them clearly experienced in doing so. It has not been possible to call all those who provided statements to give their evidence in person, but all of them can be assured that their evidence is very valuable and will be taken into account when the report is drafted.

The next step of course for the Inquiry is to examine the very significant body of evidence amassed by it and to produce a report describing in appropriate detail what happened. That report will be produced as soon as possible, having regard to the volume of material that has to be digested.

I have always made it clear that in discharging the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, it will seek to carry out, as far as it properly can, an investigation into the deaths caused by the fire of a kind that will make it unnecessary for the Coroner to pursue her own investigations.

Much of the evidence required to enable the necessary findings to be made is already available, but it's possible that some may still be missing. Piecing together the evidence relating to each person who died is a complex task, and one in which I understand that those representing the bereaved would like to join. I welcome their offer of assistance, and I hope that, insofar as they consider that the material available at this stage is insufficient to enable me to make all the findings needed to meet the Coroner's requirements, they will help me to identify what further evidence they think might be obtained within the scope of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. It may be desirable to hold further hearings for that purpose during the course of next year with a view to producing a supplemental report.

In the light of the conclusions reached in the Phase 1 report, it may be possible to make certain recommendations without waiting for the final report at the end of Phase 2. I am going to say a little bit more about that in a moment.

However, some of the Bereaved, Survivors and Residents core participants have expressed the view through their counsel that, in the light of the evidence which the Inquiry has already heard, it is clear that there are some steps which can and should be taken immediately in the interests of public safety, without the need to wait for further evidence or undertaking consultation of any kind, and without waiting for the publication even of the Phase 1 report.

When the matter was last raised, however, there did not appear to be agreement about what those steps might be, so I put in place a procedure for considering proposals from those core participants who wished to put them forward.

The first step was to invite the five governmental and institutional core participants who bear a particular responsibility for the safety of the public, or perhaps a section of it, to tell the Inquiry what steps they had already taken in response to the fire or intended to take in the near future. Position statements have now been provided by all those bodies, and have been published on the Inquiry's website.

The next step is for core participants and the Inquiry itself to put forward suggestions of their own and comment on those put forward by each other.

The expert witnesses instructed by the Inquiry will also be asked for their views.

Depending on the outcome of that process, it may be desirable to hear argument about the merits of some of those proposals before reaching a final decision.

As I have said, I think it likely that I shall want to consider some recommendations in the light of the findings in the Phase 1 report. In general, however, I think that before doing so it would be wise to canvass the views of those who have relevant experience in order to avoid unintended consequences of an undesirable kind. I shall consider how best to do that in the light of the proposals that come forward under the procedure that I have outlined.

Let me move on for a moment to deal with Phase 2. As I have said, work on Phase 2 has been under way for many months. I should like to start the Phase 2 hearings as soon as possible, because I know that people are eager to shine a light on to the various actions and decisions that ultimately led to the disaster. However, there is still much work to do. Perhaps I may be forgiven for taking a moment or two to explain why.

Phase 2 involves examining in some detail the design and execution of a substantial building project that took over four years to complete, as well as a range of related matters. Like all such projects, it generated a huge number of documents. In one sense, that is good, because much of the story will be told by the documents themselves. But it also means that there are a very large number of them to be reviewed, redacted where necessary and digested.

In addition, the Inquiry will be examining the regulatory framework and the role of the relevant authorities in relation to it, as well as the response of various organs of central and local government to the disaster. Again, there will be a significant amount of material relating to these questions.

The Inquiry currently expects to disclose over 200,000 documents to the core participants. It is about to start doing so, but the exercise is currently not expected to be complete until the autumn of next year.

The Inquiry will also be obtaining witness statements from all those involved, in particular from those who were most closely involved in the refurbishment project. Again, that work has been under way for some months, but there is still a lot to do, and new questions that need to be put to potential witnesses are likely to emerge from the documents as they are examined. As the Inquiry's lawyers become familiar with the documents, they're likely to identify new questions to put to potential witnesses. Finally, in order to enable the Inquiry to probe deeply into the work of the Council, the TMO and the various contractors, it will be necessary for its lawyers, and the lawyers for the various core participants to become thoroughly familiar with all the material to be sure that they have obtained everything that is relevant to our work.

The investigation must be thorough and the work to which I have referred inevitably takes time.

Given the scale of the preparations that have to be carried out, I think it is unlikely that it will be possible to start Phase 2 hearings before the end of next year. However, careful and detailed preparation which enables us to focus on the aspects of the project that are of real significance should make it possible to ensure that the hearings, once begun, can be completed within a reasonable time.

I know there is a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the rooms that the Inquiry has been using for the Phase 1 hearings. We are well aware that many people had hoped that we could find rooms in or at least nearer to North Kensington, but although we made many enquiries, we were unable to find anywhere that could adequately accommodate our various needs.

We have done our best to ensure that the rooms at Holborn Bars are as useful and friendly as possible and we're very grateful to the staff at De Vere for their assistance in helping us to do so, and their willingness to accommodate some of our more demanding requirements.

At the same time, however, we have continued to look for somewhere suitable further west. We are conscious given the scale of Phase 2, that we shall require larger premises in order to accommodate the requirements both of legal representatives and of those from the local community and elsewhere who wish to attend the hearings.

I am pleased to tell you that we have found some premises in west London which have recently become available and which would provide us with what we need, including a larger hearing room. We have begun commercial negotiations to enable us to take these premises and, if all goes well, we should be able to move there in time for the start of the Phase 2 hearings.

Finally, I'd like to express my thanks to all those who have been involved in these hearings for enabling them to be conducted in a collaborative way, thereby helping to ensure we've been able to obtain the fullest possible picture of what happened during the course of the night when the fire raged through Grenfell Tower. They include many witnesses who have given evidence in person, difficult though that may have been at times, counsel and solicitors representing the core participants, the members of the Inquiry team, the press who have been reporting our work on a daily basis and, of course, all those who have supported the hearings, whether as transcribers, document managers, ushers, counsellors, members of the technical support team or members of the staff at Holborn Bars. It would not have been possible to conduct these hearings without your efforts and I am very grateful to you all.

Finally, can I wish you all a good break over Christmas or whatever celebrations you are going to have. I am sure you all deserve it. Thank you very much indeed. Well, that concludes the Phase 1 hearings, and we shall be touch in due course to let you know when we are going to sit again.

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