

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: Local Authority Support for Grenfell Tower Survivors, HC 1037

Wednesday 20 June 2018

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Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Bob Blackman; Helen Hayes; Kevin Hollinrake; Jo Platt; Mr Mark Prisk; Mary Robinson; Liz Twist; and Matt Western.

Questions 1-66

Witnesses

[I](#): Ed Daffarn, Grenfell United; Natasha Elcock, Grenfell United; Sophie Earnshaw, Grenfell Housing Solicitor, North Kensington Law Centre; Jacqui Haynes, Chair of the Lancaster West Residents Association; and Tomassina Hessel, Lancaster West Residents Association.

[II](#): Councillor Elizabeth Campbell, Leader of the Council, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; and Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ed Daffarn, Natasha Elcock, Sophie Earnshaw, Jacqui Haynes and Tomassina Hessel.

Chair: Good morning, and welcome to those who have come to give evidence to the Committee; I thank you and everyone else here for coming. This evidence session of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee will look at local authorities' support for residents affected by the Grenfell Tower fire.

I want to emphasise that this session relates to what has happened since the fire. We want to look at the rehousing and support offered to people who survived the fire and their friends and families; to the friends and families of the people who tragically died; and to the wider community as well. This is a chance for witnesses to tell what has been happening to them and the people they represent.



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This session will not look at why the fire happened, its causes or anything else leading up to the fire. Those are properly matters for the public inquiry and, in some cases, for criminal investigations. For very obvious reasons, we cannot stray into that sort of territory. Let us think about what has happened since and how services have been offered or not offered in the proper way.

Before I ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, I will begin by asking members of the Committee to put on the record any particular interests they have that may affect them in this inquiry. For example, I am the vice president of the Local Government Association, which I must put on the record.

Helen Hayes: I employ a councillor in my staff team.

Jo Platt: I employ a councillor in my constituency office.

Liz Twist: I employ a councillor in my constituency office.

Kevin Hollinrake: So do I.

Q1 **Chair:** The formalities are done with. I hand over to the witnesses: could you go along the table and say who you are and the organisation you represent?

Ed Daffarn: My name is Edward Daffarn, and I am from Grenfell United.

Natasha Elcock: My name is Natasha Elcock. I am a survivor from Grenfell and a Grenfell United committee member.

Sophie Earnshaw: I am Sophie Earnshaw, from North Kensington Law Centre.

Jacqui Haynes: I am Jacqui Haynes, chair of the Lancaster West Residents Association.

Tomassina Hessel: I am Tomassina Hessel, Lancaster West Residents Association and displaced since the fire.

Q2 **Chair:** Once again, thank you for finding the time to come to us this morning; I appreciate that for some of you it was fairly short notice. We want to get from you your experiences and the experiences of the people you represent, and for you to tell us what is happening.

The first thing we want to talk about, not surprisingly, is what has been happening to the offers of permanent accommodation. Everyone who was made homeless by the terrible tragedy at Grenfell was promised they would be rehoused within a year. Why has that not happened? Why has that promise not been kept? What has been happening, from your point of view?

Sophie Earnshaw: The law centre is based on the estate itself—we are just yards away from the Tower—and we have been advising many of the survivors and residents from the wider estate. Clearly, this is very complex. RBKC have a very difficult task to rehouse everybody. However,



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we do think that unfortunately there were a number of issues along the way that slowed down that process.

I would definitely say that the level of mistrust between the council and survivors and residents is significant. The council had an opportunity to remedy that. However, we would say that the process has been slowed down. For example, in the initial months there was a lot of pressure on survivors to make very important decisions about their housing, and survivors felt under pressure to accept unsuitable offers and signed tenancy agreements. Although the council has improved to a certain extent, the residents do still feel that pressure.

There were also issues around the procurement process. Yes, the council acquired properties that were already going to be social housing properties as well as procuring new properties. However, the process was flawed in that when they did the needs assessments with the survivors, they were not necessarily listening to the needs of the households. Therefore, you have not got properties that meet the needs for all the households. There should have been a process where you are listening to the households need—everybody's case is individual and specific—and then procuring and acquiring properties that meet their needs.

For example, survivors were being offered properties on high-level floors. You have got to think of the proximity of the properties as survivors have individual needs and want to be close to their children's schools and the services they are accessing. All of this should have been taken into account.

We feel that unfortunately that has not happened, so now you have got a situation where not everybody has accepted an offer of a permanent home and there are also those people who have accepted permanent properties but who have not yet moved in for a number of reasons. I am sure that Grenfell United will comment on that.

Natasha Elcock: I echo what Sophie is saying in terms of how properties were purchased. A larger number—about 100—were made available for around September, of which some were housing association and some, which I assume were also semi-council, were refurbished for the TMO/RBKC. Then there were some that were ready to go very early on in Chelsea.

Since then, they have gone out and acquired 186 more properties, but there have been a number of stumbling blocks with those properties—they were not ready or fit for people to live in and they did not employ or get contractors to do the work on these properties until early February—so the process has been delayed because although properties were bought in the autumn last year, no one was ready to make them suitable.

In regards to people moving on, it is a huge choice. There were also a lot of issues surrounding tenancies that were not actually sorted out until the early part of this year in some cases with some housing associations.

There was also a lot of wrangling between housing associations and the council. That is a number of the reasons why it has taken so long.

Tomassina Hessel: The process is flawed not only in the Grenfell group; they have divided the community as if we had different needs, but every person and every family has different needs. There are commonalities. Some people want to come back to the estate, for example. From what I have heard, that is true of people in the wider Grenfell community as well as some people from the Tower. It is about looking at how to make the homes on the estate habitable and how to create movement so that we can get some of the people who want to leave out and make space for the people who want to come back.

A big problem with creating that movement is the lack of housing in the first place. The housing stock is too small, so we need to buy more. There are loads of prime places—for example, there is a block being built behind the leisure centre as we speak. It is about things like that: building locally and building more on the estate through refurbishment—the basements are an example. There are options to increase the stock in the area so that we do not have to push people out.

At the moment, people are being put into temporary situations but they do not have enough information to make informed choices. A lot of them are not aware that, by agreeing to this, they will potentially put themselves in a difficult situation further down the line. If landlords take back properties, there will be an urgent need to rehouse tenants, and they could then be forced into inadequate housing or further out of the borough. That is a concern as well.

Q3 **Chair:** Is it clear who is in charge of this process?

Ed Daffarn: I think things are clearer now. I would just like to say that two words organically float to the surface every time we think about the Government's and the local authority's response to what happened on 14 June. Those two words are "incompetence" and "indifference".

We started off, in the housing sense, with promises being made and a policy being brought together. That was undermined by the actions of senior councillors, who, when individual residents went up and started making noises about how unhappy they were, actually fast-tracked residents. That undermined the whole housing policy. They had a very logical, sensible policy that prioritised bereaved family members, disabled people, families and then single residents. That was logical and made sense to everybody, but that was undermined when people were fast-tracked through that process.

We do know now who is in charge of the process. Grenfell United has regular meetings with Barry Quirk and Maxine Holdsworth. They appear to listen to us. They appear to be empathetic. They certainly know the problems that we are bringing to them and what we are saying to them. Our problem is that those interactions do not seem to lead to any actual change in the pace of services being delivered. We also have to point out

that the culture within the council does not seem to have changed. Although when we speak with Barry and Maxine we are treated with respect, I cannot say that that is reflected further down the council.

- Q4 **Chair:** We will probably come on to those particular issues. Basically, there is someone in charge of rehousing, but that does not always mean that the rehousing situation improves?

Ed Daffarn: Yes. We know who they are, we meet regularly with them and we explain what the problems are—so they are aware of what the problems are—but that does not seem to be reflected in the outcomes that we receive as a community.

Jacqui Haynes: It also has not cascaded down to the immediately affected community. We do not yet have that sort of contact or input. We have residents for whom nothing has been taken into account—their children's schools and whether they have caring duties, for example. They are given one offer, which they have to take. There is no time for them to settle or to see whether that place is suitable for them.

Some of the policies that surround their tenancy in this situation mean that they feel they are in effect being forced to move out, when they are unsure or uncertain about what that policy actually means to them and how it actually manifests in their real lives.

- Q5 **Chair:** Do you know how many people who are entitled to permanent rehousing have not actually had an offer yet?

Natasha Elcock: In terms of the Tower and Grenfell Walk?

Chair: Yes.

Natasha Elcock: My understanding is that it is 203 from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk. I believe there are roughly 30 people—maybe just less than that now; as days go on, the numbers decrease—left to choose a permanent home.

- Q6 **Chair:** So 30 out of the 200 have not got a permanent offer at this stage that they have accepted?

Natasha Elcock: Have not chosen a permanent home yet.

Sophie Earnshaw: On the procurement point, if there are still households that have not accepted or are not happy with the offers that are being given to them, RBKC needs to reconsider procuring properties that match their needs.

Additionally, in the wider Grenfell area, a decision has been made that no additional properties will be bought to meet the increased housing need for those residents who have been affected by the Grenfell fire. If RBKC cannot do that financially, it needs to be clear and transparent about that. The Government made a pledge to rehouse everybody into permanent homes within 12 months, so it is for the Government to step in and invest in that, and to ensure that everybody is provided appropriate homes.



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- Q7 **Chair:** One small point, and then I want to move on to Kevin, who wants to talk about the wider policy. In terms of the people who have accepted permanent accommodation or an offer of it, are you saying that there may be people who accepted somewhat reluctantly under pressure and really ought to be given the chance to reconsider?

Jacqui Haynes: That would be for the Lancaster West—

Chair: Oh, that was Lancaster West, okay.

Sophie Earnshaw: There are still a number of households that have not accepted a permanent home, and they do feel under pressure now. There are also the limited offers. It is really important that the council considers the views of the Tower. Clearly, the survivors would not want to be able to see the Tower. The location is really important. Also, the Government and RBKC promised like-for-like properties.

- Q8 **Kevin Hollinrake:** Edward, when we met several weeks ago, I think you said you had been treated by Kensington and Chelsea as “second-class citizens”. Has that changed? Has that improved? Is anybody treated by the council as a first-class citizen? Is this just general, wide incompetence, or do you think you—the residents—are particularly singled out?

Ed Daffarn: Without wishing to get too overtly political, I would say there is definitely a group in RBKC who get treated very differently from another group in RBKC. On second-class citizens, it goes back to what I opened by saying: that feeling of being treated with indifference and contempt is just overriding. We are a year down the line now and there is still a sizable amount of people living in hotels. It beggars belief.

I want to go back to some of the housing issues to give an example of the incompetence. The properties bought by RBKC were bought without a fire risk assessment having taken place. When residents were shown their properties, they were not informed that a risk assessment had not taken place. Residents were going in and viewing properties, liking the properties they were seeing, and starting to choose furniture and imagine that they could move on with their lives, only to be told further down the line that the property that they had seen and been shown by the council, without being told by the council that it did not have a fire safety certificate, was not fit to live in.

Examples like that show the way we feel we are not being treated with the respect we deserve. Even if they had not got the fire safety certificates, they should have informed us before we viewed the properties that they did not have them and would have to undergo further tests.

Tomassina Hessel: That suggests that there is a massive communications issue. What frustrates me is that that is a terrible example of how they failed to communicate and consider the person they were dealing with, yet in the media it was made very clear that people were turning down properties. They are able to communicate and discredit survivors—I am not a survivor, but they are able to make the community



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look as if we are being ungrateful or like we are waiting for something other than decent homes. They can communicate—it is just how they choose to and to what end, and that is frustrating.

- Q9 **Kevin Hollinrake:** That is very useful. I am trying to get to a why. Why is it as bad as this? You describe it as either incompetence or indifference. If you are saying it is because you are treated as second-class citizens, it sounds like indifference rather than incompetence.

Jacqui Haynes: It is because it is permitted and has been permitted over decades. This is years of disempowerment and years of being looked upon as if we don't matter. It is just something that has cascaded. If people who are delivering services and policies to us truly believed that they wouldn't be allowed to look at us in that way, they wouldn't.

We have been suffering in these services and with this sort of treatment for years and decades, and it has been okay. It was just the fact that this disaster happened that everything sort of blew up into the air and we could see it. It was like, "This is what has been happening. It cannot continue."

Tomassina Hessel: There is a disharmony between the different sections of society. We have the corporations and the economy, which puts a lot of pressure on the Government. At the moment, it seems like money is being put before people. The people with money, and power through money, are the ones actually managing and the Government seem to be serving them, rather than serving the people that elected them. That needs to change. People's needs—humanity's needs—need to be put before capitalism.

- Q10 **Kevin Hollinrake:** I would like to look at the wider policy on rehousing. In terms of the wider residents, there are 127 households in need of rehousing and only 39 in permanent accommodation, which is a similar proportion to the Grenfell residents. What thoughts do you have in terms of wider housing policy? I know the law centre has made some comments on that.

Tomassina Hessel: I am directly affected by that. I have fought for a long time and I rejected a lot of properties because they were privately owned. I wanted some security for my son. We have been in a hotel for a year now. He goes to school and he has had enough upheaval. I did not want it to be that potentially in six months or a year down the line, we would be moved out of the borough, like I said earlier, or into housing below decent homes standard just out of urgent need. By then we would not have, frankly, the bargaining tool and position that we have now. I have now personally been put into a housing association property, which gives me a little bit more security while we figure this all out.

- Q11 **Kevin Hollinrake:** Is that a temporary home?

Tomassina Hessel: As temporary accommodation, yes. A lot of people are in private rented housing. I know that one lady was living in hers for two months and then was told she had to move because the landlord was coming back. My concerns have become real already.

There are questions about the affordability of this in a longer period. If we go by the last year, we are not going to be resolving the housing situation in the next six months or so, so what is going to happen with affordability? What will happen to rents?

I was a mother and I was planning to go back to work in September, which hasn't happened yet, so I am still on benefits. That is a very low income. I was able to survive in the property where I was where heating and hot water were included. The new property I have moved to is in another borough, Hammersmith and Fulham, so that incurs travel costs that I didn't have before. I have to pay heating and hot water additionally, which is fine, but the problem is that I am going to now have to rush and get a job when I am not even ready. I am still a bit in all this chaos and the aftermath. There are loads of concerns on a very personal level and that is what I don't think is being accounted for.

Sophie Earnshaw: One important point about survivors and the wider Grenfell community is that there is an unprecedented mental health crisis now.

Q12 **Kevin Hollinrake:** I think we are going to come on to that in later questions.

Sophie Earnshaw: Yes. It affects decisions being made as well, such as decisions on housing. As I mentioned before, there was a lot of pressure in the initial months. A number of offers not accepted might have been due to whether someone was in the right head space to be thinking about housing weeks after the Grenfell fire.

With the wider Grenfell community, I don't think you can overestimate the impact this has had on that community. At the law centre, we are very concerned about a number of people in temporary housing, most of it rented from private sector landlords. There is no definite timeframe for rehousing the residents from the wider Grenfell area. With the number of houses on the register as it is, particularly with three-bedroom-plus properties, it will be some time before those people are rehoused.

In that time, how many times will they have to move because of the temporary accommodation? I have already got a client who moved into temporary accommodation and two months later the landlord gave notice to the council. Now she is going to have to move again. She is a secure tenant with 20 years' tenure. She would ideally like to return but can't because of mental health issues.

We are worried that people will feel they are in a position where, if they don't know when or if they will be rehoused, plus the issue around housing rights with housing associations that Natasha flagged and having the same housing rights that they had on the Lancaster West estate, you might find that some people decide, "Okay. We'll just return, because we don't have any confidence that we are going to be rehoused anytime soon."

Q13 **Kevin Hollinrake:** Sure. In your report, you mentioned that, in the wider estate, RBKC is not procuring any additional properties to rehouse



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individuals from the surrounding estate who are traumatised by the events of the fire.

Jacqui Haynes: It also affects the turnover. We have people who want to move and are waiting for decent offers. At the same time, they are holding their tenancies, so there is no opportunity for turnover of those properties, which affects the housing policy even wider than that.

Tomassina Hessel: Also, in terms of the even wider community, which does not have a policy, but if you were No. 3 on the list on the housing register and you had been on the list for five or seven years, you are now suddenly now No. 300 on the list. If we don't resolve all of us from the estate of Lancaster West as best as possible, those people are also going to be affected and that will have a knock-on effect for mental health, because there is a strong link between suitable housing and the impact it has on your life and your ability to work and raise a family. Those things need to be considered and they have not been.

Q14 **Mary Robinson:** Clearly, the effects and stress of this are still ongoing. I am wondering about the future. Sophie, you indicated that decisions were being made by people who were not in the right head space to make them. Not only are there potentially issues for people now making choices and not really feeling they are in the right place to do so, but people may already have made those choices.

How long do you think this is going to go on? Are we looking at something that is going to take several years to get anywhere near? People will be coming back and saying, "I chose really badly because of where I was."

Sophie Earnshaw: There are survivors who opted to sign temporary tenancy agreements because they did not trust the process at that time and it was a very difficult decision to make with the impact of the fire. Now they are in a situation where they are anxious about signing up to the secure tenancy agreements, so it is definitely ongoing.

There also needs to be support in place for survivors ongoing, in terms of the properties they are in now. I am sure Grenfell United will be able to expand on that. There needs to be that ongoing support and commitment and the assurance that the council understands the needs of the survivors and the community.

Jacqui Haynes: One of the fundamentals here is accountability. When we are talking about mistrust, it is because historically we have been told, "This will happen, that will happen," and then when we get ourselves ready for it, it's a totally different story and nobody cares that it is. There is nobody who we can go to and say, "This hasn't happened." Looking forward, accountability needs to be a very serious factor, and systems must be put in place so that that accountability is clear, and so that we are aware of how to seek that accountability. Unaccountability is one of the major things that has had an effect on this situation.



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Natasha Elcock: Regarding the choices that people have made in the past year, and those who are still yet to make a choice, can I just describe what life was like before? There were 129 flats in a block, which was part of a community. A lot of the properties that people have chosen are now separated from the community.

People spent six months, perhaps a year, in a hotel where they have created a community, whether that be the porter, the maid or the person who brings whatever to their room. They have had that sense of community for the best part of a year. Now we are asking them to move to a street property where they don't know anyone; they don't know their neighbours. They have to get used to everything.

First, the decision is huge, and secondly it is about what happens to people afterwards. As Sophie said, we need to look at what that the long-term plan will be. People will need support. People's lives are going to be changed. We have seen survivors who have gone into flats and something's occurred, and they have had to return to hotels because they were frightened or because they were isolated. That will be a lot to do with what happens.

We have to live in hope that people will get properties and try to rebuild their lives—it is really important that they do. It is also really important that everybody understands that this is not going anywhere. We have just hit the year mark, and we are starting to see a change in how people are behaving through trauma—obviously we will come on to that in a second. However, we must be mindful that this is not as simple as giving someone a set of keys; it is not as simple as giving someone a new home or giving everybody new furniture.

Every single person that will be moving on has lost not only their home but everything about them. Most people tell me, "I never moved from Grenfell; that was my first home and had been for the best part of 20 years." Moving home is the most stressful thing, and to move home with absolutely nothing and have to rebuild that and get all those knick-knacks is a huge thing. It is really important that support mechanisms are in place for a very long time. People will change their minds and things will happen along the way.

Q15 Matt Western: Thank you all for coming this morning and giving up your time from work or whatever to be with us and give evidence. I had been here just four days when this terrible tragedy happened, and it seemed to have very strong echoes of Hurricane Katrina and the magnitude of that event. Given the scale of the tragedy and its consequences, do you think that the Government should have put the council into special measures almost immediately, recognising how complex the consequences of this would be, whether for mental health, housing, immediate needs and so on?

Ed Daffarn: Within the first couple of weeks we went to visit Secretary Javid, and we told him explicitly that what he needed to do at that time was put the council into special measures. He chose not to take our



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advice, and the decision to do that is evident now. The local authority does not have any authority. If you see the meetings it holds in public, you will understand what I am saying.

It has lost trust and it has lost its legitimacy. The only way that could have been re-established was for the council to have been placed under special measures, but that didn't take place. There is now this vast chasm of distrust between the community and the council that, at best, will take many, many, many years to rebuild.

Do you want me to say a few words about that at the moment? The opening gambit at the public inquiry, which we will not go into too much, was that the council was dreadfully sorry about what happened, and it was determined to get to the truth. Then the opening statement doesn't get to the truth and is not honest about what was going on at RBKC.

It is not honest about the little cabal of senior councillors and council officers from housing, from corporate property and from planning who had decided to asset-strip the whole of our community, sweat our public buildings, disregard the people who live there, and force us from the land that people were living on because it was a goldmine—they just didn't have to mine it; they just had to marginalise the people living there.

That was what was going on at RBKC. That is why Grenfell happened. If they had been concentrating on keeping us safe in our building—if they had had their eye on the ball—Grenfell could have been avoided. If they had treated us with the respect that we deserved, Grenfell could have been avoided. There is this mass chasm. For trust to be rebuilt, RBKC need to start telling the truth. They need to be honest about what was going on. They need to admit what was going on. They have not done that, and that is so offensive and so upsetting, because it goes back to what happened at Hillsborough, and goes back to that feeling that we are not going to get justice and we are not going to get truth.

We deserve truth and justice after what happened. RBKC need to speak with their lawyers and come out with a different way of dealing with this problem. They need to be honest. They all know what was going on there. Barry Quirk turned round in a meeting we had at Grenfell United and said that RBKC were a property developer masquerading as a local authority. Think about that: they were a property developer masquerading as a local authority. A local authority's first duty, as it is the Government's duty, is to keep the people safe. They failed to keep us safe, because they had higher priorities. Their priorities were about getting their hands on the land—this massive goldmine that they had.

While that is going on, we have those same senior officers at RBKC in position. We have the same senior councillors who chaired the scrutiny committee that, as residents, we went to and begged for help. We were ignored. Not only were we ignored, we were pushed to one side—marginalised completely, on two different occasions. The last occasion was when we went and spoke to them about the appalling refurbishment works at Grenfell. Instead of listening to what we were saying—



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Chair: I think we are just beginning to get into areas before the fire, which I appreciate you feel very strongly about.

Ed Daffarn: Okay. Very briefly, I just want to say that those senior councillors and the senior officers are still at RBKC.

Chair: It is perfectly legitimate to talk about the here and now, absolutely.

Ed Daffarn: Okay. I just want to say another couple of things. We have offered the national Government and the local authority chances—opportunities, I would look at them as—to prove that they are willing to change. They involve North Kensington library, the college in Wornington Road, Canalside House and various other public assets.

A year later, we are still fighting the battles to have those properties—those public assets—guaranteed back into our control. I would ask that the Government and the local authority really work. Part of rebuilding trust would be that they show us that they are serious, and that they actually take steps to return those buildings back to our control.

Q16 **Matt Western:** To extend that, perhaps it was Jacqui or Tomassina who was talking about the lack of systems accountability and so on. I am just very interested to know whether it is possible to rebuild that relationship with the authority, and whether there is integrity and you believe now that you can work together in the future.

Jacqui Haynes: I have always said from the beginning that they are spending too much money, too much time and too many resources on trying to rebuild trust. We don't trust them, and possibly that may not happen for years. People trust in results. If they are working towards giving us the results that we need to rebuild our community, and that we need to rebuild the services, we understand that we need to work with them because we need to do this for our people.

As I say, it is not about building trust; it is about working together to ensure that what the community needs is what the community gets. Once that has happened, people will start to trust in the systems, because they have played a part in developing them and they have played a part in informing and shaping them, so that they actually address their needs. It is not about individuals; we need to look away from that.

It is about the kind of work that is delivered, the way it is delivered, the way it is received and the intentions behind it. If the council truly intend to help, then that needs to come through in what they are delivering and the way they deliver it, and how they want to get the information from us to help them to do that.

Tomassina Hessel: The system is flawed, because people can hide behind the system. It is like a curtain that you can hide behind and say, "Look, we followed protocol and therefore we did as we were supposed to," but again it is what Jacqui was saying about results.



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My perspective on this is that we have to change that system going forward, and the best way to do that is to listen to what the people say—for us to be actively involved in rebuilding that process. Up until now, I would say that they have done everything to make it appear as though they have been listening to us and working with us, but time and time again we have seen how decisions were made before they consulted us and then, when we were consulted, very often promises were made but then they were not delivered on time, or they were not delivered to the specifications we had agreed on. That just keeps eroding; even though we are collaborating to some degree now, it has not yet been effective.

Q17 Matt Western: Can I move this on? I am going back to my first point, which was about whether the local authority should have been put into special measures immediately after the tragedy. You are talking about incompetence or indifference, or whatever. How much of this would you say has been down to a lack of capacity? Is that lack of capacity or degree of being overstretched still apparent?

Tomassina Hessel: I don't think they had lack of capacity. They are very good at what they do when they choose to do something. It is just that their priorities are not on us. I think that is very much the case. On special measures, I would argue, "How different is RBKC from national Government?" I am not sure of that answer myself at the moment, but I am a bit concerned that there is not enough of a difference to make a difference.

Jacqui Haynes: Firstly, their absence—their total absence—in the very immediate part of the disaster in itself showed an incompetence, in that they did not know what to do; they did not know how to address us. We, as a community, who are the experts on ourselves, had to pull together to do that. So there was an immediate thought of incompetence: "Why don't they know what to do here? Why is nobody coming here and sorting this out? These are the people who are supposed to know what to do in a situation like this."

So there was that immediate incompetence, and then when they finally did come, it was just about making panic promises and throwing money around and not knowing what to do. When people were trying to draw them in, to say, "We need to consult. We need to work together. You need to listen to the community," that seemed to be a problem.

They found it easier to employ lots of engagement staff, to throw money everywhere and just say to people, "Yes, we'll do this, we'll house you here," and make promises that they couldn't keep. That manifested into a major struggle, because then people were trying to access those things that they were told were going to be, and it just wasn't so.

Sophie Earnshaw: As a general point, I think there needs to be a change within the culture of the local authority. Yes, there were changes at the senior level and people who understood the issues and what needed to be done, but that needed to be trickled down at every level. This was a disaster, and everybody needed to be on board with what they needed to



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do, and to make sure that they were listening and dealing with the survivors and the community first and foremost, and listening to their needs.

Jacqui Haynes: While there is a remit to the level of this meeting, it really does have to cascade down from the top. No matter how high or what position people have, if they are allowed to ignore us, if they are allowed to give us incompetence in service, they will continue to. It really does need to funnel down from the very height.

Q18 Helen Hayes: You mentioned, completely understandably, mental health issues. I want to ask a little more about that. The local NHS trust estimates that more than 11,000 people in the wider area have suffered significant mental health trauma. Have those residents been able to access the support services that they need to address that trauma and those ongoing mental health issues?

Natasha Elcock: With regard to the NHS and what was offered very early on, like everything else in the first few months, it was absolute chaos. Obviously, we were dealing with a huge tragedy and a disaster and lots of people would have been affected. As survivors and the bereaved from the Tower, we found that we were forgotten about.

While the trust looked after the wide and wider community, and not necessarily the next affected in line, i.e. Lancaster West, we found that we were bypassed. There could have been a number of reasons for that. They say that PTSD does not kick in for a while and stuff like that, but Grenfell United recognises that there was not enough support there for us very early on. We then started to talk to the head of the trust and to the heads of the different services and tried to shape those services for the survivors and the bereaved, especially the children. Since those conversations and that dialogue opened up in October, things have progressively changed.

Hopefully, the outcome will be that we have taken away a lot of the red tape. We have spoken to them about how there is stigma attached to mental health. A lot of people in the community will not necessarily reach out for help because of that stigma. However, one of the first things they did was to change the name so people can access it and will not feel embarrassed but seek help. I will say that they were willing to change the way things were done before. We mentioned Hurricane Katrina—they have spoken to people out there about how they have dealt with the aftermath of Katrina, to get an insight into how to support us. They know that the process is just starting.

In terms of the wider community, they are saying that 11,000 are affected. That is the way they target it, so they are able to work from the outside in, but the core affected people—the Tower residents, the bereaved and Lancaster West—were forgotten. It is just now starting to trickle out. But the trauma is just starting for people. The PTSD is just kicking in for people. I am not a clinician but I assume it does not start immediately after—you start to get that later on, as we are all now starting to experience.

Jacqui Haynes: As with most of the services, initially everything was one size fits all. The trauma affected different people diversely, but nobody was looking at how to tailor services to this particular disaster. Later, the NHS were very present in the community. They have worked very hard to engage and to try to find out what it is, but because it is such an unprecedented situation—it has not been written and we do not know—it needs to be a lot more tailored, because we do not necessarily fit into the general trauma script.

Tomassina Hessel: To elaborate on that, clinical therapies are very individual. One thing might work on one persona's trauma but it might not work for someone else. It is a case of trial and error. When people have stigma against something, to have that persistence is even harder when you have a resistance to it.

Having understood the community a lot better, having spoken a lot to the different cultures in the community and understanding what their attitude towards mental health is, I have heard a lot that it is really important for people to be in groups in communities, so group therapy is a big aspect.

As Natasha said, it is important for it not to be called therapies, so to have retreats in nature—we have community groups doing that. That is a massive thing because it connects you to nature and to people and it gives you the support you need. And it empowers you, because at the same time it allows you to feel that you're supporting others, so you don't feel as victimised in the process itself.

It is about coping and using that as part of a more holistic therapy intervention in this situation. Therapies may well cover specific issues at certain times but, overall, to maintain mental health, you need the more natural, human aspects—fresh air, sunlight, people.

Natasha Elcock: What is definitely happening now is that there is room for change; there is help. From when we talked to the head of CNWL—Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, which is the local trust—there was no pushback. There was no, "We can't..." They know what they are dealing with; they know the complexities of the community, or at least are trying to understand the complexities of the community; and out of all the organisations that have come since the fire, probably the NHS is the most willing to change and the most willing to adapt how they work with an individual community.

For us there was a positive outlook in terms of the NHS. Our biggest fear would be how long that funding lasts. How long will that service be there, because people are just accessing it now? As I said, that trauma is just kicking in.

My fear is that, in a year's time or two years' time, when people are at most need, that won't be there. It will be back to business as usual. We really need a commitment for people's mental health—people who suffered Hurricane Katrina are still suffering—along with all the other stuff that needs to happen for the community. And it's quite important that we get



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the commitment from whoever that may be—Government or whoever—that the NHS will be able to continue to do the work that they're doing.

Ed Daffarn: I totally agree with what Natasha said on the long term—it's not going to be solved overnight.

- Q19 **Helen Hayes:** Do you think adequate account has been taken of the impact of trauma and mental health within the housing allocations policy? It's one thing providing support for people; another thing is that the impact the fire has had on people is being addressed within the wider housing response.

Sophie Earnshaw: People are not settled yet and for a lot of people the grieving process won't properly begin until they have a home—it's not about bricks and mortar; this is about having a home. And at that point, that might be the beginning of the long process ahead. That is also why there needs to be ongoing mental health support, but also ongoing housing support from the council for those affected.

Natasha Elcock: They need to join up. A lot of the services were very disjointed early on and they are now coming together, whether it be data sharing, or just understanding, so that all the agencies are working together for the same outcome. That is quite important, too.

- Q20 **Mr Prisk:** Ed, you and I have discussed in the past the problems looking backwards at the TMO, and you have written extensively on that. However, given the inquiry, what I would like to look at today briefly is the estates that the council is now running, with the TMO stepping out of it, and what that means for residents. Obviously this would be the estate as a whole and in particular—I am aware of time, Chairman—what do residents want in terms of how the estate is managed in the future?

Ed Daffarn: You will have to direct that question to the Lancaster West Residents' Association. I will just make one quick observation. The TMO has been disbanded, but their workers have been TUPE-ed over to the council. So we would like to know something as a community. They were, to all effects, a non-functioning organisation: they were highly abusive; they didn't care about their residents; and they cared about themselves. I believe all of that will come out in public over time, but these same workers have just taken their jobs and transferred to work in the council.

What I would like to know—as a community we have a right to know—is this: what are the council doing to ensure that the culture that existed in the KCTMO no longer exists inside their new position within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea? There is some anecdotal evidence already that nothing has been done about that, and that the same sort of culture exists.

It is a very simple question. What are RBKC doing to monitor the performance of the workers who came from the old KCTMO and are now supplying the same services to residents? As residents of Grenfell Tower who have been rehoused, we are not going to have our services supplied



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by those same people who may have had a hand in what happened at Grenfell.

The question that would be good to ask the council is what its plans are. Who is going to manage our homes and how is that going to be done? The original plan was to get an organisation called Pinnacle to come and manage our properties. Pinnacle's chosen builder was Rydon and Rydon—the builders that did the construction work.

Once we pointed that out, they said they would look at other options. We believe that they are taking those options in-house, but it would be good to get some clarification about exactly how those plans are set to work in terms of how residents living in new properties are going to have those properties managed by RBKC moving forward.

Jacqui Haynes: We shared Ed's concerns—that the same services, with the same attitudes, were going to be delivered to us. We have been working with our housing management so that we are shaping our services, because we are adamant that we are not going to go back to that or be subject to that any more.

What we have had to do is to challenge structure, challenge the way that services are delivered and the way that we participate. We have now managed to institute systems whereby residents are made a part of almost every process that happens, be that recruitment or decisions that are being made around the estate. We are now working to look towards more resident-led management as well.

That is what we have had to do because there has been absolutely no sign of any improvement and the mere thought of returning to services being delivered by those same people was just not negotiable. It just wasn't for us. What we would like is for Kensington to look at how they are working with us and how they might be able to roll that out, because it is the only way that it is going to work now in the wake of what has already happened. We have effectively had to take the helm ourselves and start to develop our services with them, and say to them, "No, you are not just going to give us—you are going to have to work with us because we are going to have to live in there."

For instance, with our maintenance service, they are now looking at an internal service, whereby we are not in that pot with those old same workers. Our calls and all of our work will be led directly from our housing management system, by residents with residents. That is how much faith we have in the authorities that are supposed to deliver those to us.

Q21 **Mr Prisk:** So a change of personnel but also a change in the way the management oversight works, because the old board was obviously too distant?

Jacqui Haynes: And a whole change of attitude. The attitude now is that you need to speak with residents. Residents have to be on board and be a part of this. There is nothing really that should or can be done where there is no involvement or liaison with residents.



Q22 Mr Prisk: So the board didn't have any liaison with you as residents—if you put a complaint up, that was it? Nothing happened? I am sorry; I am stretching it slightly.

Jacqui Haynes: They were just doing what they were doing and in the wake of this tragedy, everybody is trying to find and develop new systems. For us, the point was that we become integral to those systems so that they develop to include us and we play a part in them, because we need to recreate a culture that works for us.

Tomassina Hessel: There are different stages to this. The management of social housing stock is a borough-wide issue. The first thing for residents to become involved in is being educated on the various options. Having looked at some already, there are different layers, from us taking total control over management to just having negotiations and being in partnerships or agreements to varying degrees.

We may take care of cleaning, for example, and you can take care of pest control, or whatever it is. There are loads of different ways. What I am saying is that I don't want to have all the responsibility put on residents. They have to remain accountable. So part of the process is developing a way in which we can hold them to account going forward. That transparency needs to improve.

The system needs to be simplified. I think a lot of different groups were working together but not co-ordinating well together in the past. And to reinforce what Jacqui said, to have residents at the heart and being involved is really important to ensure that services are focused on them, not anything else.

Jacqui Haynes: Again, it is about honesty and following through. We have a refurb process going on—development of our estate—because it has been severely neglected for so long. Promises are being made—"what do you want?"—but we do not have the financial backing to effect what we want. Again, promises are made but then, when you cannot do it, who is accountable? Where do we go with that? That is also something for us. We have been made promises around development, but we are not sure how or if they will materialise.

Q23 Jo Platt: I want to hear your thoughts on the independent review on combustible cladding. Despite the failure of the Hackitt review to recommend a ban on the use of combustible materials on the cladding of high-rise buildings, the Government is now consulting on this. The Committee will follow that up in the next couple of weeks. What is your message to the Government and us on this issue?

Natasha Elcock: It's quite simple: it should be banned. I say it a lot and I will continue to say it. First things first, no one should go through what we have gone through—absolutely not—but also no one should go to sleep at night knowing they have got combustible cladding wrapped round their building.



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We are hearing today that a well-known hotel is going to strip cladding off their hotels, and if a hotel can do that for the safety of its guests it is only right that the Government ban this stuff. You know, £400 million has been set aside for housing associations and councils to remove this cladding from blocks, but we do not really see a plan for that. That money is out there, but what does that look like?

We know there are fire wardens walking around estates making sure that people are kept safe because they still have this cladding. Things are not happening quick enough. It has been a year, and it's quite evident that there was something really wrong with what was put on that building. I appreciate the way things are done—people need to be consulted—however, we need to take immediate action. Other countries have banned this stuff. I do not see why we should be any different.

That is just my personal opinion. Our worlds were turned upside down 12 months ago, and as survivors and a bereaved community we should not be fighting for what is right for other people. We will if we have to, but we should not have to. It should be banned, and it should be banned now. We shouldn't wait.

I haven't read Dame Judith Hackitt's report extensively, but she left it open to consultation. That was not the outcome we had hoped for. We hoped the Government would have taken action straightaway, but we will have to wait for the consultation, and we have to live in hope that, at the end of it, everyone agrees that it should be banned. Right now, I have zero faith that that will happen, because if we had any intention to ban it, it would have been banned six months ago.

Q24 Jo Platt: Is that zero faith in the system—

Natasha Elcock: I have to have a little faith, but you have got to think about why have a consultation if the moral right thing to do is ban it. That is the moral right thing to do.

Q25 Chair: Is that the general view?

Jacqui Haynes: For us, we have to look first at the intention behind the Hackitt review. The Hackitt review was given to us because the social housing policy and building regulations were refused to be addressed in the inquiry, so this was something we were given as a "there, there." The intention behind it was not really to find justice on this building safety issue.

For me, in short, we are all sat here after the disaster knowing the potential of those materials and what the possibilities are, and we are therefore all culpable while we sit here with that knowledge. How can that be? How is that a discussion?

Tomassina Hessel: We've got so many issues in this country at all levels, yet we want to invest time, energy and money into a consultation on something that should be common sense and obvious. Would you or



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anyone knowingly live in a house with something that we know has caused something like this?

Jacqui Haynes: What's the message? "We know that this is there and we know you live there, but you don't matter enough for us to do something about it"?

Tomassina Hessel: That material is not even legal in the country where it is produced. That says something in itself as well. The idea should not even be entertained. The answer should be, "No, it should not be legal".

Chair: I think that is a clear message.

Ed Daffarn: Briefly, exactly as Natasha said, the fact that there are 300 buildings still with this cladding on is a disgrace. Grenfell 2 is in the post unless you act, and quickly. It is not only social housing—it is public buildings and also buildings that have leaseholders involved. The Government need to take responsibility for this. They need to step in, end people's misery and fear and act. £400 million is not enough, and there is no plan behind it. There needs to be a plan, and it needs to be acted on right now.

Chair: Okay. I think at that point we will have to draw things to a conclusion, because we have the council representatives coming to give evidence to us next. I thank you all very much for coming and answering our questions this morning. I hope you feel that you have had the opportunity to tell us what is and is not happening in your communities and what needs to be done better to improve that. I thank you very much for that powerful message about cladding materials at the end, which I am sure will go out widely. Thank you very much indeed for coming.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Elizabeth Campbell and Barry Quirk.

- Q26 **Chair:** Good morning and thank you for coming to give evidence. Could you please say who you are and the organisation that you represent?

Elizabeth Campbell: I am Elizabeth Campbell, and I am the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council.

Barry Quirk: My name is Barry Quirk, and I am the chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea Council.

- Q27 **Chair:** Thank you for coming. Obviously one of the main issues is the rehousing of people who were affected in many ways by this terrible disaster. Do you have a precise figure for how many people who are entitled to permanent rehousing have not yet been permanently rehoused?

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes. From the Tower and the Walk, 83 people have moved and 101 people have accepted permanent rehousing but haven't moved yet. We have 19 people who haven't yet accepted permanent rehousing, and of those I would say we have a plan for probably about 18, because we know them very well and we are working very closely with them.

- Q28 **Chair:** That is an agreed figure, is it?

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes.

- Q29 **Chair:** So nobody will come and say that you have given us a different figure from what somebody else has?

Elizabeth Campbell: No. That is an agreed figure.

- Q30 **Chair:** We heard this morning about people being offered properties that simply weren't suitable. Why has that happened during this whole process?

Elizabeth Campbell: I think there are two things. I would like to start by saying that 90% of people have accepted permanent properties, so they obviously feel that those are suitable. One reason it has taken us quite a long time is that we have really tried to give people a choice.

We have understood what Natasha was saying it earlier about it not just being a property that people are moving into but a home. As she said, people do not even have a photo—everything's gone. We have really tried to personalise this, and find places that people want to be. That has taken time, but we have been working with people all the way along.

- Q31 **Chair:** You say "all the way along". Is that an acceptance that things haven't improved from the beginning, because at the beginning they weren't very good, were they?



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Elizabeth Campbell: I think that is fair enough. I accept what people say. I think in the beginning they weren't good, although the intention was always there. I think we learned from that. We went out immediately and bought 110 properties. As people are saying, some people felt that that was not where they wanted to be, or they were on higher floors.

Q32 **Chair:** What was said to us was that before you went and bought the properties, you didn't listen to what people wanted.

Elizabeth Campbell: Well, we did listen after that. We took that on board and we went out and bought another 200 properties exactly where people do want to live. Some want to live in North Kensington around the same area, because they obviously have really close contacts—their children are in school and their grandmothers pick them up. Other people said, "I'm very happy to be in Chelsea. I don't want to be in that area". Some people who I visited on Kensington Row said, "We are happy to be on this floor". We have tried to give people a choice.

Barry Quirk: May I give some context to this and talk about what happened in the early stages and how we have tried to improve on it? First, the thing that surprises me in going to Kensington and Chelsea is the fact that homelessness is the most symptomatic urban stress indicator. Of all the factors that focus on local government, if you look at needs anywhere, homelessness is the top issue in Kensington and Chelsea.

Only one authority in London—Newham—has a higher rate of homelessness per 1,000 of the population. Kensington and Chelsea now has 2,050 households in temporary accommodation, outside this issue. There is one household in temporary accommodation for every three properties that we have. There are only 6,500 council-owned properties, and only another 13,000 social houses. This authority is known for the high value of its properties, and it has very few social houses.

Q33 **Chair:** To turn that round, Mr Quirk, you are saying that homelessness is the highest priority. Would a better way of putting it be to say that homelessness is the highest pressure, and you haven't in the past given it enough priority?

Barry Quirk: It is the highest pressure, and it should be a top priority for the council.

Q34 **Chair:** It hasn't been in the past, has it?

Barry Quirk: It has been inasmuch as people have housed people, but they haven't been able to re-house them properly, so they have housed them in temporary accommodation.

Q35 **Chair:** So it hasn't been the highest priority, has it?

Elizabeth Campbell: It is now.

Barry Quirk: Yes. I will just mention that at the time of the fire—I came to Kensington and Chelsea 10 days or so after that—the authority had 7% of its tenants in hotels. The challenge is how to find accommodation for



people, and what errors are made on the way. You are holding us to account, and it is important that we give an account of the things that did not go completely well and the things that went wrong. At that early period, for the first three months, the arrangements for rehousing were the responsibility of the London resilience arrangements. Housing was being managed—until 8 September, I think, when we took responsibility—by a team of staff from across London. Most of the people who were managing the response were from teams of staff from across London.

At the time, one of the early errors—I was party to this—was when I met all the housing associations and registered providers that had any properties in the locality and said, “Look, we need as many properties as possible”, so that they could be made available. To put it bluntly, we did not do sufficient quality checks on them, and we had offers of properties from people who simply were not suitable.

We were desperately trying to solve a problem. I think, as someone mentioned earlier, that actually added to the problem of mistrust, because in a sense it was the classic problem of trying to hit a target but missing the point. We were desperately trying to get as many properties as possible from housing associations and others, and make them available, without going through and without genuinely appreciating the depth of grief, despair and trauma that people were subject to. Housing was the first priority, but it is not the overwhelming priority. The overwhelming priority is humanitarian.

- Q36 **Chair:** I will just follow up on two brief points. In the previous evidence session, as you probably heard, people were saying that they would meet with you and they appreciated you going along to the meetings. You are the person who is in charge of this. You were very nice and polite to people, and people probably welcomed that as a change to what they were used to in the past, but then nothing happened. So you are there in office, but not actually in power, to use a phrase.

Barry Quirk: Well, I’m sure that may be some people’s perception. I would say to you that it takes time to change organisations. I think the important thing is that I have changed the management. I am changing the management of the TMO as well, and the management of the whole of the council. We are hiring people on behavioural competencies, not just based on experience but on how they treat people, particularly focusing on compassion and empathy for senior staff.

We are also developing a major culture change for the rest of the organisation. I spend most of my time as the chief executive having discussions with staff. Last week I spent quite a lot of time with frontline staff and other staff discussing the challenges that we have and how we need to be very different as an authority.

This is an authority that has extremely good adult social care and exceptionally good children’s social care. When you are providing social care, as you know, the issue really is about what the rules, norms and thresholds are, what the basis for intervention is, and what the nature of



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best professional practice is. We spend £55 million on adult social care and £50 million on children's social care. This year, we are spending £50 million on Grenfell. We essentially have three welfare and social care departments.

The Grenfell function is fundamentally different from children's and adults' social care. It is not based on norms, thresholds and needs. It is based on a sense of obligation and duty, as well as meeting needs. What we have to do is recognise that we are a very different council now, that we have to act differently, and that we have to act exceptionally differently in our frontline. I think the big issue here is housing management, and that was the point that Ed Daffarn was speaking on.

Chair: We will probably come on to those issues.

- Q37 **Mr Prisk:** Before we get into the generalities, I want to come back to the 19 families that have not accepted permanent accommodation. Have they been offered at least one property, and is the situation with those 19 that they have been offered something but it is not suitable and they are going to be offered something else? I just want to make sure that we do not lose sight of those 19 households.

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes, everyone has been offered flats, but equally, if you were going out to find something, you might not want to take the first offer or the second. You want to find something that is really suitable. That is why I am saying that we are trying to do it in a very personalised way, because there are very few people from the Tower and the Walk who have not yet chosen something. We can work with them very closely, and we believe that out of the 19, 18 are pretty close to coming to some arrangement with us. Also, to pick up on what was previously said, if you are dealing with people who sometimes are not sleeping through the night or have other issues, it is difficult.

- Q38 **Mr Prisk:** So 18 are nearing it.

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes.

- Q39 **Mr Prisk:** And one not at the moment.

Elizabeth Campbell: No.

Mr Prisk: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that we did not lose sight of the individuals.

Elizabeth Campbell: Those are the correct figures.

Mary Robinson: Mr Quirk, you mentioned that there had been changes at the management level. You are obviously focusing on this to a large extent. However, hearing from the residents, they were concerned that there was a pre-existing culture in the way that they had been treated by staff—by people who they had encountered. They were concerned that when people were TUPE'd across at the TMO, which was taken in by the council itself, the same way of treating them would be there with those people. One of the things that they wanted to know was what you were



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doing to monitor those people, their performance and the change of culture that needs to happen.

Barry Quirk: I personally think that that is a very powerful and important point. It is important that we change the culture in the housing service, whether that is the delivery of dealing with rents, rent arrears or voids, repairs and maintenance, or conventional housing management. The key thing is management leadership and ensuring that it has changed, and it has.

The next thing is ensuring that we establish very clear standards of expectations for staff—the expectations and obligations they have in the work that they do and the way in which they engage with residents. In Kensington and Chelsea, almost one in three of the residents are leaseholders; two in three are tenants. When I use the term residents, in a sense it is tenants and leaseholders. It is important that people are treated completely compassionately, properly and professionally, and that people deliver on what they say.

Turning around an organisation like this takes some time, because we need to evaluate the competencies of the managers, change some management staff and monitor frontline delivery. We are putting that in place. We currently have quite a number of vacancies as a result of the changes that we have made. We are in the process of hiring people to meet those vacancies. I would say that we are at a turning point in our housing service.

Of course, the future of the service is not something that we have decided. We will have discussions with residents—tenants and leaseholders—about the future direction of the management of the stock. The TMO was a managing agent. It was the largest tenant management organisation in the country—I think the second largest is only a thousand or so in Leeds. They mostly tend to be small organisations of 300, 400, or 500. Kensington and Chelsea's was 9,000 at one time, or about that number, if you add it together, and therefore there is a discussion to be had with tenants about the way in which they want the service to be managed in the future.

Do they want lots of individual tenant management organisations? Do they want one organisation? How do they want it to be organised? It is not an arm's length management organisation; it is not stock transfer. The council is the landlord. People are the tenants. The TMO is simply a managing agent on behalf of the authority.

- Q40 **Bob Blackman:** May I clarify a couple of issues in terms of the statistics, which is an area that has been shrouded in a degree of mystery? Figures that I have seen suggest that the council has made 866 offers to 209 households. Is that the correct figure? If it is, that means that at least four offers per household have been made, and they would appear to be the wrong sort of offers of unsuitable properties, or just unacceptable to the people who are being offered them.



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Elizabeth Campbell: First of all, I believe the number of offers you said is correct, but it is to 203 households. Yes, we have made offers to people, and we believe that the homes we have offered are of a very high quality, but just because something is of a very high quality and it looks nice, it might not be where you would choose to live. I think that is fair enough. We went out of our way to offer people a choice, so you cannot then say, "Well, you've been offered the choice, and you've had lots of offers, therefore, you're ungrateful because you haven't taken them." I do not think that is fair. From our point of view, we would say we did offer a choice and people have taken it up—90% are happy with their choice, which is important.

To pick up on what people said previously, what we do not want to happen is for someone to feel that they are forced or pushed, or for them to get the keys, go into their flat, we refurbish it and so on and then they say, "Oh, this isn't where I want to be." It is better if they are feeling a bit wobbly that they go into interim accommodation and have time to think about it and time to look around and then make the right decision for them and their family.

Barry Quirk: The process of offers is extraordinarily different and is not anywhere near the same as what would happen in offering council properties on the waiting list or the transfer system. It is incomparable. It is not even worth saying, "Here are the offers and this is what happens elsewhere." It is an incomparable position. If fault is to be found, it is not with the people who haven't accepted permanent offers—it is with us for not finding them properties that were suitable and I think we should accept that.

Q41 **Bob Blackman:** Okay. The other issue I want to clarify is the statistics. The council acquired 307 properties as a result of the need to acquire. How many of those are occupied and what is happening to the remainder?

Elizabeth Campbell: 320 were acquired. At the moment, 83 people have moved in, 101 have accepted and 19 have yet to accept.

Q42 **Bob Blackman:** So what happens to the balance of properties that you have acquired?

Elizabeth Campbell: We said we hope that everyone will have accepted by July, but if not we will reserve a property for each of the people, and the rest will go on to the main housing register so that other people, for example in the wider estate, can then bid for them.

Q43 **Liz Twist:** I wanted to ask about the properties that you bought. We heard a lot of concern about delays in them being made fit for occupation. You have bought the properties but a huge amount of work needs doing on them. What steps have you been taking to resolve that problem and to make sure that they are in a fit state when they are offered?

Elizabeth Campbell: Because we are incredibly densely populated and because property prices were really high, it was an incredible feat to go out and purchase them within the first three months. As Eddie was saying, some are in mansion blocks. That might be one property within a group of six. We are the landlords of the people who are moving in and it is really important that safety is absolutely paramount, but the standards that we need to put in are obviously different from everywhere else. That is one thing we would say we should have immediately looked at when we purchased them.

Barry Quirk: Yes. I said earlier that I think an error was made in the beginning and I think an error was made here, bluntly. As Eddie Daffarn said in his presentation, essentially people were offered properties where we said, "We have a property for you that seems suitable" and we purchased those properties in the owner-occupied market where fire safety standards are much lower. They were bought not just as single units—they were flats, often in blocks where it was going to be the only flat with others. So we have to then get involved in some very complex discussions, at least in some—it depends entirely on the nature of the property.

We hired a contractor to do that work for us because we weren't expert in doing that, and after three or four weeks we changed that contractor. That was yet another delay. I certainly own up to the errors we made there. We could have done that probably a month to six weeks quicker in my view. It was about learning about buying street properties that we were then going to let, but they weren't street properties, they were in blocks. None of the people essentially had experience in doing that before.

As some people have mentioned, this is unprecedented, particularly the scale and scope and the concentration in the locality. It has raised unprecedented challenges to professionals in desperately working quickly, doing things properly and fairly and doing the right thing. It is very, very challenging, and we could have made it quicker, certainly in terms of the housing on the way. How much quicker? I would have thought two or three months, at most, to be honest.

Chair: We have a lot of issues to go through for the rest of the session.

Q44 **Matt Western:** Just out of interest, a quick question to start: when were you first offered help by the DCLG, as was, or by the Mayor of London in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy?

Elizabeth Campbell: I am trying to think. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy I was not the leader, so I will hand over to Barry for that.

Barry Quirk: From the outset, when I attended, for example, our meetings of London Gold, which was managing the response for three months, DCLG officials were present. There were discussions about how we were going to fund things and I would say that DCLG were positive from the outset. That also included the GLA and discussions with officials at the GLA. Therefore I would say certainly from the time I was involved, seven days afterward, there were networked arrangements from across



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London and with central Government to find out what had to be done, who had to lead on what and what had to be funded in what way. I don't think there was a reluctance on the part of anyone to be involved in this, from my perspective.

Q45 **Matt Western:** So housing would have been on the agenda on day one?

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes.

Barry Quirk: Yes. For example, the boiler for the whole of the estate was underneath the Tower, and therefore there was no hot water because there was no boiler. It being summer, there was no need for heating, but there was need for hot water. So there was a lot of discussion about housing and how to deal with these emergency issues. There was a boiler brought in by, I think, the Army at one stage. That was overseen by London Gold. But housing was there from the very outset.

Q46 **Matt Western:** Okay. I think you will have picked up that the Prime Minister has said that it has taken too long to find new housing. You have given some numbers, but you have not said by when you would expect these last 18 or 19 to be housed. When do you think that will be?

Elizabeth Campbell: I think we have learned from the past about having false gateways to get through. We would say, in the same way that you have heard from people here, that we do not want to pressurise people to take things. We would hope it would be as quickly as possible, because being in your own home probably makes it much easier to start your life again, pick up employment, etc. They will move when they are ready to move, but we are giving them all the encouragement and support we possibly can to enable them to come to that decision, without putting undue pressure on them.

Barry Quirk: Yes. We are making very clear, when properties that are currently not available that should be available, what the dates are. But we are not saying, "This is the date when you're moving in," because that is a matter for those people.

Q47 **Matt Western:** So it is open?

Barry Quirk: Yes.

Q48 **Matt Western:** You will have heard from the previous session some strong words being used about the authority and its leadership—accusations of incompetence and indifference. I would be interested to know why you think that is the case. Had you been in the situation of the survivors, how would you have expected to be treated in terms of housing?

Elizabeth Campbell: I did hear the allegations of indifference, and I do not recognise that. They were talking about culture starting at the top; as far as I am concerned, we absolutely do care. We are totally committed to working with everyone and in consultation with everyone. We are committed to getting people houses as quickly as possible.



- Q49 **Matt Western:** But, as I said, if you had been in the place of one of the survivors, given the way you have dealt with those survivors, would you have been happy with that treatment?

Elizabeth Campbell: Let me just say something else before I answer that question. I think the way that the survivors and the bereaved have treated us as councillors has been nothing short of amazing. They have been unbelievably generous of spirit in actually even talking to us. If my child had died in a fire like that, would I talk to the council? Probably not. They have been absolutely extraordinary.

Would I have thought that everything had been handled perfectly? No, I am sure I wouldn't, because people have been in hotels for a long time. However, it is complicated.

- Q50 **Matt Western:** So you would be happy? You said "perfectly". I am not talking about perfectly; I am talking about sufficiently well or adequately well, but that is not what we are hearing.

Elizabeth Campbell: I hope that by the end you would. To begin with, it is very difficult because quite a lot of it is about relationships, such as between your housing officer and you or between your key worker and you.

It is also about trust. As you heard earlier, we didn't even start off with zero trust, we started off with zero minus 20. That takes time to build, and quite a lot of that is about working personally with saying, "Here is this flat; will you come and look at it?" and being believed and trusted that we are doing the right job. I don't believe that we got that right in the beginning, but we have worked extremely hard to try to do everything we can since then to build that. That is an ongoing process.

Barry Quirk: In relation to the word incompetence, this is an extraordinary challenge, professionally, managerially and operationally. It is also extremely demanding of resource. The authority—with a turnover of £170 million—has committed and deployed £429 million, mostly from its prior reserve pool and from borrowing. Competence depends on your capability and capacity to respond to something. Essentially, we had assets and reserves and borrowing potential, but we only had 2,000 staff. Some authorities in London have 5,000 or 6,000 staff. Essentially, we didn't have sufficient competence to deal resiliently with a challenge of this nature.

In terms of indifference, as was mentioned, it is about a culture around social housing that goes back and is very broad across the country—it is quite a problem in London, because of the housing crisis in London—and the fact that social housing has changed in character. London is very different. Some 65% of people rent, with most privately renting, so renting has become a very different issue and has changed its culture. That has been experienced in a very harsh way, with the TMO being said to not have provided sufficiently compassionate care. I understand that entirely.



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However, indifference can also come from a professional detachment or a sense of self-regard on the part of professionals that they know best, or from the transactional relationship that they have with their service users. Kensington and Chelsea is very good at service-user engagement, but we need to be good at community engagement. It is only when we are able to do that that we will move to being able to deal with issues of competence and proper engagement, rather than indifference.

Q51 Matt Western: Essentially you are saying that there was a massive lack of capacity in the immediate aftermath.

Barry Quirk: Yes.

Matt Western: Was that supported quickly enough by other authorities, whether that be the Mayor or central Government?

Barry Quirk: I would say that, at the time, there were up to 600 people from other authorities working in Kensington and Chelsea, so there was lots of deployment. In some ways, the deployment of people created its own problem. The example I would give is care. There is a conventional way you deal with civil contingency when there is a crisis, but there hasn't been a crisis of this nature.

I feel we are the only public authority ever that is having to solve a problem that the people who suffer from the problem believe we have created. I can't think of any other—even Aberfan. Perhaps Christchurch in New Zealand; I know that was an earthquake, but basically the problem was caused by civil engineering in two properties. That of itself creates a fundamental issue of trust. This authority has been investigated for corporate manslaughter. I believe we are the only authority trying to solve problems while it is under investigation. That in itself presents fundamental issues.

In the early days, we had lots of social workers from across London, who were allocated people. Lots of people didn't want social work; they wanted practical assistance and support. Some people did want social work, but many didn't. What we had was an approach that was social work-based. We then changed it to an approach that was much more about care and practical support, but then people did need therapeutic social work support, so we had to change it again.

It was very important that we got people from all across London. What we need to do—this was mentioned earlier—is learn from this. It is not just about holding us to account for our failures and errors, but about what can be done in other major incidents like this.

Chair: There are pressures of time, so can colleagues focus on the particulars of each issue we are going to come to?

Q52 Liz Twist: I want to talk about the wider Grenfell housing policy. It has been criticised for excluding too many people by drawing the line too close to the Tower. Do you think that is a fair criticism?



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Elizabeth Campbell: We went out and consulted with the wider community, especially in that area and beyond. We changed our policy to enlarge the area to take in residents from Treadgold and Bramley, because we felt they should be within that. Of course, people in the wider area also suffered, but we had to draw the line somewhere.

We consulted a lot with residents, and we thought that was fair. We deal with people from outside the area on a one-to-one basis. If we believe they really are completely traumatised, we look at moving them. As Barry said, we have a shortage of housing in which to put people, so we have to start with the Tower and the Walk. They are our priority. In July, we will release those properties to people in the immediate estate, and after that to others.

Barry Quirk: We are aware of a number of individuals and households who are living on the margins of the area and are not included. We are looking at them on a case-by-case basis. It depends entirely on the impact that it has on the individual. That doesn't mean it has to be staring them in the face. It is the impact on them; they may have a pre-existing mental health condition or other conditions. We need to look at this on a case-by-case basis and not make group-based judgments. Group-based judgments have failed in the past, and they will fail if we make them here.

Q53 **Liz Twist:** How successful do you feel the policy has been in rehousing people in the wider area?

Elizabeth Campbell: For the Lancaster West estate, we evacuated more than 340 people that night—we had them in hotels. We have only got 13 in hotels and three in serviced apartments left out of that cohort, and we have 74 who are in interim accommodation. That is difficult, because they have a flat in Lancaster West estate—most people stayed there. Those people are now weighing up whether they want to or feel able to return.

Remember that the Tower has only just been wrapped, and their homes are right underneath it. Each family—each household—will come to a different decision. We hope that some of them will return home—many of them have—and for those who will not, we will give them 900 extra points, which is about the same as if you have a serious disability. Later on, they can bid for permanent housing elsewhere.

Q54 **Liz Twist:** What about tenants in the private rented sector? I think there was a commitment to help those people. Is that happening and what steps are you taking to do that?

Barry Quirk: I actually do not have the information on that, and I think I will get back to you on what we are doing for those who are private renting. There is a difference between people who we have placed in private renting as opposed to people who are private renting, if you get my meaning. I will look into the question about people who are privately renting on their own account, so to speak, to see whether there have been issues in relation to us. I will get back to the Committee.

Q55 **Helen Hayes:** As recently as March, the Grenfell recovery taskforce said



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that it still hears about unsympathetic or inappropriate responses from council staff and councillors towards residents. We heard about some of those concerns earlier from residents. Do you think the council's relationship with residents has improved over the last year?

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes, I do, but, as we said before, from quite a low base immediately afterwards. Certainly, we are doing everything that we can to change that.

To go back to what Eddie Daffarn was saying—the whole thing about truth and us not being open—one of the things that we would say is that we will be totally open as an authority. We are not defending anything in the inquiry. We have given 13 million documents to the police and to the inquiry. We say that we will co-operate in any way, and whatever the consequences are, we will take them. From that sense, we are trying to rebuild trust.

From the point of view of councillors, we have a new council now, which was elected in May. Half of our councillors are new. We have a completely new induction training programme for them and for existing councillors in trauma training. We expect all our councillors—this is one thing I will say in a speech to the council tonight—to be community leaders and to be linked in to the community. That will change the prior perception that we did not care, that we were indifferent or that we were non-empathetic.

Barry Quirk: This is a year. In 2016, when I was the chief executive in Lewisham, I went to the 35th memorial for the 14 black, young teenagers who died in the New Cross fire. As people have said, we are trying to develop, with our partners in the NHS and with community representatives, a recovery strategy, which is recovery-plus for the area, which covers two years, five years, 10 years, a generation.

I am not satisfied with the level of sympathy—you say, have we improved the sympathy from our side? I am not satisfied with that and I will not be for many years. We really have to recognise the depth of grief and despair, and the trauma, that people have gone through. They have to have enormous amount of justice delivered to them, and we have to demonstrate, continually—we are not looking at whether we are trusted; we are looking at the character of what we are doing day by day, inch by inch.

It is nothing to do with whether they trust us. We can only be as good as we can be and make the staff who work for us as good as they can be. Am I pleased with where we are? No; we have to improve on it. But I have to say, I have been to many staff and I am really impressed with some of what the staff do.

It would be wrong for me to say that I had gone to an authority and found staff who were unempathetic. I found that many of the professional staff in social care and adult social care, in children's and environment and dealing with street enforcement to be extremely good. The issue is that



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this needs to pervade all of our approaches, particularly for people with the most urgent and pressing needs who live in social housing.

- Q56 **Helen Hayes:** Does the council have the resources that it needs to ensure that key workers and other staff have the time they need to provide an acceptable level of service to residents and to drive the culture change that you talked about?

Barry Quirk: We do for this year and next year. We are working towards what is the resource that we need for the longer term. We are currently at the end of response. Recovery requires substantial investment in the social and community fabric and in economic and employment opportunities as much as it does in the physical fabric: the look and feel of the place.

There is an inevitable tendency to focus on the look and feel of the place and how can we invest to make this a great place to look. Actually, we want it to be a great place to live in. To do that, we need substantial resource over the longer term.

Elizabeth Campbell: We are completely committed to that. Again, listening to people on the panel before when they were saying how important it is, we would totally agree with that. This summer we will be going out, again in consultation with survivors and the bereaved, to co-design our services and look at what it looks like.

You cannot just think that you are going to give someone a house, they turn their key and then everyone's happy. It is not like that. It will go on and they have to have key workers who they can depend on, who understand them, with whom they can have a relationship, and ditto probably within a different service for housing.

Of course we have that when people move in. We have someone on the phone who can help, but it is more than that. If you have faced the depth of desolation that a lot of those people have, it does not just go away in the twinkling of an eye. It will take a long time, and we have to be behind them all the way.

- Q57 **Helen Hayes:** In November, it was reported that the council had spent a million pounds hiring 28 communications and engagement professionals on one-year contracts to spread the message about its work in the aftermath of the fire. Was that the best possible use of resources in the circumstances?

Elizabeth Campbell: Of the media bit of that, we have four press officers, which is probably less than quite a lot of other authorities across London. A million pounds is probably at the height, because we are just taking people on short-term contracts. A lot of that was communications for which we have been rightly criticised by the taskforce, so we did newsletters, engaging with residents, websites, communication with all survivors and bereaved and the surrounding estates so that they knew what was going on. But it's not a million pounds now, is it?

Barry Quirk: No. The issue is the importance of frontline engagement. Of course there are media people we have employed—



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Elizabeth Campbell: Four.

Barry Quirk: Four. There is also a focus on internal communications. There was no effective internal communications in the organisation, so it is not just about hectoring people and lecturing them. We have to communicate properly in a two-way way. We have got to be professional. I would say that Kensington and Chelsea, compared to other London authorities, did not really have a corporate centre, a corporate core. So it was responding to issues on a service basis.

What we needed to do was to establish a connectivity in the organisation. What you learn from one thing improves outcomes in another service area. This was a particular weakness in relation to response. So we have increased our audit risk and management, but that did not get publicity. What gets publicity is the communications and community engagement. But that will not be the figure at the end of this year. We are taking that down.

- Q58 **Jo Platt:** Elizabeth, residents rightly told us earlier about the ongoing support that they will need, which you previously alluded to. Have you developed a long-term plan, and have you developed that alongside residents?

Elizabeth Campbell: We are just moving, as Barry said, from the response part—the immediate response—to our long-term recovery plan. That is what we will be doing this summer, starting quite soon actually, and we will be developing it alongside residents. Again, Barry, Rob and the others meet with Grenfell United every other week, and we are doing everything in conjunction with them.

- Q59 **Mr Prisk:** Since March, the council has taken over the running of estate services from the old TMO. What are your plans for improving services, and indeed the accountability of those services, for residents?

Barry Quirk: In terms of the accountability, the council dispensed many years ago with its consultative arrangements with tenants and residents. We have reinstituted them, such that there are now regular meetings with the deputy leader, who leads on the housing estates, Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith. Doug Goldring, who is our director of housing management, we have reappointed. He has experience in bringing in house, both in Islington and Hounslow, two large housing offices. This is a relatively small one—9,000 in total, with leaseholders.

What we are doing is changing the management, changing the approach and changing the systems, making sure that we have a proper complaints system both within the housing department and outwith it, such that people can complain of the way in which their complaints are being dealt with. One of the features of the past was the absence of a corporate complaints system. It is important that complaints are built in, so that it is a learning organisation rather than one that just defends its position.

It is critical that housing departments, because they are having hundreds of contacts every day with people, learn from those contacts. Ensuring that it has good customer service and good complaints management is



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critical, and we are putting those in place as well. I would say that we are not just changing the management; we are changing some of the systems, and we are changing its accountability by having a tenants-consultative council again, where they regularly give an account of what they are doing and how they are doing it.

- Q60 **Mr Prisk:** You probably have across the borough a number—I know you want to consult residents, so you do not want to prejudge that—of estate services provided so that where there is a particular issue on the estate, those people can feel that they can speak to somebody who is close to them, and it is not some distant person with a board that does not take any notice.

Barry Quirk: Yes.

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes, and we are also seeing practically, on the ground, a very good record from the current people, because we had a few months ago a backlog of 5,000 repairs, and we are down to 1,000. We are really trying to move fast because, again—this is what we were saying earlier—you build trust by what you do rather than by what you say. I think that is a good example of where we're—

- Q61 **Mr Prisk:** So you inherited 5,000 repairs?

Barry Quirk: Outstanding repairs.

Elizabeth Campbell: Outstanding repairs, yes. We are down to 1,000, so we are really working through.

Barry Quirk: We remain concerned about the responsiveness of repair and maintenance, and we are making sure that we can improve on it.

- Q62 **Jo Platt:** The Government have recently launched a consultation into banning the use of combustible materials in the cladding of high-rise buildings. As you may know, the Committee will also be looking at this as some follow-up work on the Hackett review. Would you support a ban on combustible materials in the cladding of high-rise buildings?

Elizabeth Campbell: Absolutely.

Barry Quirk: Unequivocally.

- Q63 **Chair:** Just as a quick follow-up, Mr Quirk, you have said this is an authority that does many things very well but does social housing pretty badly; I think that is a fair description of what you have said. If you are going to improve how you deal with social housing in the future, is there a commitment by the council to provide more social housing in the long term?

Elizabeth Campbell: Yes. I said that—absolutely.

- Q64 **Chair:** Just one follow-up point to Councillor Campbell. An accusation was made by the previous panel of incompetence and distrust—they said that was how some people felt about the council. You said you didn't recognise that. Do you think it is a concern that you do not recognise



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what people feel about you? If so, what are you going to do about it?

Elizabeth Campbell: I am sorry; I didn't mean that I didn't recognise—I didn't recognise incompetence in the last year. Of course I recognise people felt that previously. As I have said many times—

Q65 **Chair:** Well, they said today that they still feel it now. They still feel it exists.

Elizabeth Campbell: I am sorry; I was just going to finish by saying, yes, I think that is indicative of where we are. As I said, I think it will take us a generation to regain that trust. You cannot come from minus 20 to plus 50 in the twinkle of an eye. We have to work at it—we have to work very hard at it. I accept their challenge that culture starts at the top, and I think it starts with me.

I am absolutely committed to doing everything I can in that place, and I recognise completely what people feel. I am out there in the community talking to people, and I have been since day one. Although I also say they have been very generous in their attitude towards me, that does not necessarily mean that they trust us as a council. As Barry said, it has been a very difficult situation, in that we are the providers of housing to people who believe that we were responsible for the fire that killed their loved ones. It is quite an ask for everyone to try to build those bridges, but build those bridges we will.

Q66 **Chair:** Clearly, there are challenges there. I am sure the Committee will want to keep a very close eye on these matters. We have the Minister coming to respond to us again at a further session, and we may want to ask some further questions of you to see how things are progressing in a year's time.

Elizabeth Campbell: Absolutely. We are open to everything.

Chair: Okay. Thank you for coming to give evidence to us today.

Elizabeth Campbell: Thank you.