

Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce

FIFTH REPORT

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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick, MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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6 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State

ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA (RBKC): CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY TO DELIVER A RECOVERY FOLLOWING THE GRENFELL TOWER TRAGEDY.

INTRODUCTION

We write with our views on the capacity and capability of RBKC to deliver an effective recovery for those affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy of 2017.

Following our last report in July 2019 you asked for a further update early in 2020. Herein we give a detailed assessment of progress against the eight recommendations we made in our July 2019 report. We set out areas for further improvement that continue to cause us concern, and suggestions for the way forward.

SUMMARY

We are pleased to have seen progress against all of our eight recommendations. In addition, many of the workstreams set out in the RBKC Grenfell Delivery Strategy have progressed. However, we remain concerned about the pace of change; the culture across the council; and the quality of the relationship with the bereaved and survivors and the wider affected community.

Consequently, we remain unable to give you unequivocal assurance that RBKC is effectively delivering a recovery for the bereaved and survivors and the wider community in north Kensington.

We are mindful in this report that phase 2 of the Grenfell Public Inquiry has recently started in January 2020. This is a testing time for the bereaved and survivors, the wider community and the Council itself. Inevitably relationships are strained. In our view it becomes even more important that the council makes sure that it has the capacity and capability to continue

to deliver recovery services and demonstrate a cultural change in very challenging circumstances.

PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS

This section assesses progress against the eight recommendations from our last report and areas where we still have concerns. We have highlighted the workstreams that demonstrate greatest improvement.

Recommendation 1: clear written operational plans for all workstreams that contribute to recovery. Plans should have clearly defined outcomes as well as outputs, timescales, responsible Councillors and Officers, measures of success, risk registers and mitigation plans.

Progress

- There has been greater emphasis on demonstrating that key Recovery Strategy workstreams have effective operational plans. These are mostly evidenced in the reporting to the monthly Grenfell Delivery Assurance Board Papers which now include forward plans to July 2020, key milestones, responsible Members and Officers, measures of success, risk registers and mitigation actions. Below these we have seen some detailed operational plans.

We are pleased that RBKC have made real efforts from September onward to improve their planning and their reporting of progress on individual workstreams.

What Next

- It remains the case however that the plans vary in quality: not all outcomes are SMART¹ - identification of success measures is an area of weakness.

Recommendation 2: Stronger assurance and demonstration that the leadership can drive recovery at pace. Robust and agile governance plans to drive this would help.

Progress

- Systems have been put in place to help drive delivery of the different workstreams outlined in the Grenfell Recovery Strategy.
 - A monthly Delivery Assurance Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, is in place that looks at workstreams funded by the £50m Grenfell Recovery budget
 - Every third meeting of the Delivery Assurance Board focuses on wider Council activity to support recovery including Public Health, Planning, Housing, Human Resources.
 - There have been two meetings of the quarterly Grenfell Strategic Partnership Board which brings together external partners.
 - We are pleased that five new senior roles have been appointed :
 - Executive Director of Housing and Social Investment
 - Director of Communities
 - Director of Grenfell Partnerships
 - Director of Social Investment and Property
 - Director of Planning and Place

¹ SMART: In this respect we understand it to stand for -Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely

- with the rest in post, by April 2020. We have suggested strengthening the senior capacity for some time, so this recruitment is welcome, particularly in light of the inevitable additional pressure on the executive management team arising from Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

What next

We remain concerned about the overall pace of change. Too often we have seen milestones being put back or taking longer than planned to deliver and the council putting forward reasons why it cannot do something rather than what it will do. The senior Leadership Team have clearly stated their wish to change this throughout the organisation. We know that embedding this attitude will take many months to achieve. We would urge greater challenge from the senior Leadership where a “can’t do” attitude is expressed.

There have been some problems following changes to Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. From September 2019 the following new arrangements were put in place:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee which agrees a prioritised work programme and allocates topics to the four Select Committees. This committee looks at Grenfell Recovery budget and spend.

Grenfell Recovery will also be looked at in the four new Select Committees in line with their responsibilities. The four being:

- Adult and Social Care Select Committee
- Environment Select Committee
- Housing and Communities Select Committee
- Family Services Select Committee.

The new arrangements are designed to mainstream scrutiny of Grenfell Recovery throughout the council’s scrutiny function. A consequence of this reorganisation was the ending of the Grenfell Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The new arrangements raised concerns amongst the community and in the opposition group who withdrew from taking a formal role in scrutiny. This has left some committees being managed by the Vice-Chair for a short period, while the issue is being worked through. We are disappointed that an accommodation has not yet been reached as any uncertainty or controversy over scrutiny arrangements is a concern in the difficult circumstances that RBKC are in. We urge all Councillors to work constructively together to ensure exemplary scrutiny arrangements.

We consider it was premature to remove the specific Grenfell Scrutiny committee and embed scrutiny of Grenfell Recovery in other Scrutiny select committees. It would have been better to make sure the Public Assemblies were well established before changing the Grenfell Scrutiny arrangements.

We would like to see the council commit sufficient resources to making sure that then new arrangements are fully embedded including:

- on-going training / peer mentoring for Chairs and Deputy Chairs
- Members and Officers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and how they inter-act with each other, for example Lead Members are clear about their role and responsibility in relation to scrutiny, as are Chairs of Select Committees
- There is a sharp and focussed work-programme of issues to be scrutinised that is adhered to and that looks regularly at Grenfell Recovery issues.

Recommendation 3: Ensure the Leadership is bringing the whole council together behind their recovery vision to actively address silo working and engender council-wide culture change.

Progress

The council has initiated a range of corporate activity to drive culture change including:

- A cross-council Leadership programme to challenge silo-working and foster greater collaboration both internally and externally. The intention is the programme will embed the new values and “develop the right process, policy and systems to embody culture change”.
- Embedding the Learning from the Grenfell Programme looking at Housing, Commissioning, Public Health, and the customer interface.
- The People Strategy sets out what is now expected of all RBKC staff in terms of demonstrating the council’s new values (launched first quarter 2018). Performance management has been changed to reflect this.

What Next

Changing the culture of an organisation is a difficult, complex and long-term goal. The Council have recently given us a comprehensive picture, with timescales and key milestones, of what is happening to drive culture change across the organisation. The picture is complicated with some work being started in in late 2017, and others coming on-line during 2018. Key milestones are set for the end of 2019 and early 2020. We are not therefore in a place to judge the outcomes now, and how well some of the interim steps have embedded themselves in the council. We encourage the council to maintain focus on driving culture change across the entirety of the council and how they will demonstrate that change.

The council have been implementing the recommendations made by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in their report looking at scrutiny and governance within RBKC, with the support of that organisation. A number of governance changes have been implemented, and training for Councillors is underway. This work has not always been straight-forward or delivered in the way that some of the experienced external organisations advising and providing training have anticipated. We know this has been a matter of concern to them and discussions are on-going. Further work and training is planned for the future. We urge the council to continue to implement the changes recommended in that report.

Recommendation 4: It is clearly communicating the recovery narrative the risks to it, and mitigation plans via a range of channels demonstrating their commitment to the spirit of the Hillsborough Charter.

Progress

The Communications effort has improved and there are plans for further improvement. The Council has reviewed and strengthened the Communications Team.

- A range of new communications products are evident including a targeted and bespoke North Kensington News.
- The new council website was launched in late December and has a portal specifically reporting progress on Grenfell Recovery Strategy
- The Communications Team is working with all RBKC departments to improve the overall communications impact.
- The Council is undergoing an LGA led peer review during December – January to help them ensure the communications function has sufficient capacity and capability.

What Next

We understand that a sufficiently significant portion of the community has expressed a preference for printed communications. Nevertheless, there appears to be a reliance on traditional modes of communications including printed documents and public meetings and less focus on social media and e-communications. This has begun to change over the past few months and we encourage RBKC to continue to develop its communications channels to meet the needs of its residents.

Recommendation 5: Better programme management of the recovery programme. We would like to see it demonstrating a clear understanding and reporting of success measures, for example.

Progress

- The Grenfell Delivery Assurance Board has been refreshed and looks at all workstreams directly related to Grenfell Recovery, as opposed to workstreams that will contribute to recovery but are borough wide.
- There has been greater emphasis on making sure plans are forward looking.
- A strategic Risk grid as well as individual workstreams risks are clearly evident.
- The Grenfell Team has the remit of providing project management support to the Grenfell response. The team have substantially improved reporting during the past period including a greater emphasis on forward planning, improving risk reporting and mitigations measures.

What Next

There has been considerable improvement in the reporting to the Grenfell Delivery Assurance Board. The next step would be to ensure that consistent high-quality reporting is embedded across the council.

Recommendation 6: A convincing long-term housing strategy to address the investment challenges the Council faces.

Progress

- With regard to the rehousing of the 201 Grenfell Tower households made homeless by the tragedy, RBKC have re-housed 194 into permanent homes. A further 4 households have accepted permanent homes but are yet to move in. Of the remaining households 2 are living in temporary homes and 1 person remains in a hotel (classified as emergency accommodation). Whilst it has always been acknowledged that the rehousing programme for Category A households would conclude with a small number of more complex cases, progress on rehousing the final few cases is painfully slow.
- Progress has similarly been made on rehousing those households made homeless from the wider Lancaster West estate, but further progress is hindered by the shortage of availability of larger properties.
- A medium term 3-year housing strategy has been agreed and published. The strategy has an honest appraisal of the challenges and is bold and ambitious. It heralds the delivery of world-class services. This is a significant change for RBKC, and we commend their aspiration. This Housing Strategy raises the bar for achievement. It is focussed on 6 key priorities and what it lacks in “comprehensiveness” is compensated

by ambition and focus. The Council actively engaged with the Task Force on producing the strategy and responded positively to a number of suggestions.

- A renewed capital programme has been launched to attend to the catch-up investment required in the Council stock and to extensively refurbish the Lancaster West Estate.

Next Steps

There are plans for the rehousing of the remaining small number of former Tower households. A sustained and concerted effort is required.

The Council will need to prevail on partner housing associations to provide the larger properties required for those household from the wider Lancaster West Estates. A planned event with the major registered providers of housing in the borough, involving Grenfell United has been postponed/cancelled. This was a missed opportunity and some mechanism for capturing this essential supply needs to be crafted.

The action plan attached to the Housing strategy needs to be implemented. This action plan has over 90 deadlines for actions to be completed and around 50% of these are in the first 6 months of this year and already some are behind schedule and will not meet the deadlines. This is not a major problem yet, but greater planning and project management discipline is required. A mechanism for quarterly review by the Scrutiny committee was agreed when the strategy was adopted, and this scrutiny process will need to be tenacious and robust in holding officers to account. Momentum for delivery has to be increased.

Planned major refurbishment works on the Lancaster West estate on which consultation was commenced in first few months after the tragedy are still some way off commencement – currently scheduled to commence in June 2021– 4 years on. Like large parts of the housing capital programme the timetable has slipped. The works should be commenced as soon as possible, and greater discipline needs to be instilled on capital programme and project management. A programme of internal works to empty properties on the estate has been completed to an impressive standard, but there are concerns amongst local residents that the ambitions for the wider improvements to the area will be compromised by a lack of funding.

Recommendation 7: Honest analysis and consideration of the capacity and skills in the council to face on-going and future challenges. This should include both internal challenges around delivering culture change as well as external challenges like the impact of the Public Inquiry.

Progress

- The Chief Executive set out further changes to the council’s management arrangements in his paper “Forward 2020” to be implemented over the following 3-6 months.

This and other documents seen by the Taskforce exhibit a growing self-awareness.

Next Steps

Many of the changes to the management arrangements are dependent on all of the five new Directors being in place which will not be the case until April 2020.

We have also seen a lot of churn of staff over recent months, including those who have been most closely associated with the recovery to date. This is perhaps inevitable as individuals either wish to move on or, in the worst cases, burn out. We would like to see further assurance that the senior Leadership is giving due consideration to support to all staff and that they are considering the stability of the council going forward.

Recommendation 8: Give community engagement the strategic prominence required to begin to address the hostility and mistrust expressed, particularly from some communities in North Kensington. The council needs to do more to build on the social capital that has been evident in the past two years.

Progress

- The council is in the process of recruiting a dedicated Director of Communities who will be in post in April 2020
- The council has initiated regular discussions with the wider community in North Kensington via a Public Assembly to discuss issues of concern to that community. As of February 2020, the council have held two events. They did plan to hold these events every two months. That schedule was disrupted by the General Election.
- The Community Engagement Team has been significantly strengthened with the recruitment of eight new Community Engagement Officers, in place since October 2019.
- The Grenfell Projects Fund decision day was held on 11 January and allocated £200k to 17 projects: 9 on well-being for children and 8 for educational opportunities. The Grenfell Projects fund supports community led projects that will help the recovery in north Kensington. The decision on which projects to fund were made by local residents themselves. We commend everyone involved for this event which by all accounts was demonstrably a new community led approach by the council. A further Grenfell Projects Fund event was held on 8 February and allocated £400,000 to 41 projects covering the four remaining outcomes:
 - Social and cultural events that bring communities together and provide information to increase connections across the community including initiatives to reduce isolation for older people.
 - Community safety that increases the safety of everyone,
 - Activities for young people and
 - Food growing / greening and food-based activities that increase communities coming together and enhances the local environment.

Next Steps

While the Community Engagement Team at the council has been substantially strengthened and given greater prominence it remains early days. We are not yet able to see what impact this strengthened team will have.

This issue has not been addressed with the urgency that we had hoped. The relationship with the wider community, by now, should be stronger than it currently appears to be. We continue to hear reports from community groups and individuals of cases where their reception by the council is either ill-considered or brusque.

For the sake of clarity, we would like to make it clear that our concerns are **not** about the work of the Community Engagement Team. They **are** about the culture of the council as a

whole specifically and the ability of Councillors and staff to make the most of every interaction by:

- Making it a positive experience in terms of the experience - staff are courteous and respectful, have the skills to manage difficult conversations well where necessary; and
- Have the opportunity and systems in place to share information about an individual's needs with the departments other than their own in order to provide a more holistic and joined up service.

The council have suggested a number of areas where they do have a better relationship with their community. We do not dispute that. The recent decisions day where local residents decided on the allocation of £200k of the £600k Grenfell Projects Fund is an excellent example.

The ability of the council will be severely tested over the coming years as phase two of the Public Inquiry does its work. Greater pace in this area would perhaps have put the council on a better footing to continue to develop a collaborative and constructive relationship with the affected community.

ASSESSMENT

We have noticed an emergent new ambition within the council with documents declaring bold ambitions for the delivery of “world class” services and a “reinvention of local government”. In previous reports we have stated that the Task Force has “set the bar high” in its judgement of RBKC. RBKC is setting the bar high for itself too. This is a positive change and reflects a growing confidence in meeting the challenges.

However, we still have concerns over the pace of delivery and inconsistency in the demonstration of cultural change across the council. The recommencement of the Public Inquiry early in 2020 brings new and added pressure.

Although we are now beginning to see many of our recommendations being acted upon, in many areas it remains early days. We are yet to be convinced that the changes we are beginning to see are sufficiently embedded to have long-term traction throughout the whole council. We continue to hear community voices that tell us that they do not see sufficient change from RBKC, and they remain concerned that the council will regress to a pre-tragedy “business as usual” state.

We know the ambition of the Council leadership is that this does not happen. It will need sustained and visible leadership from them to make sure that all members and officers are clear that is not an option and are supported in making sure it does not happen.

RBKC will need to be resilient to both continue on its improvement programme and to weather the demands of the Inquiry and the associated media attention.

It will be a challenge to the leadership of RBKC to continue to demonstrate the ambition they have for the council and to model the behaviours they expect of others during this time.

We understand that culture change is a long-term process that will take many months to fully implement and embed.

We think that the foundations have been laid and, in most areas, built upon. The challenge now is to maintain focus and not slide back and to demonstrate that there is a tangible change.

We have knowingly set the bar high for this council. We understand that some may feel it is too high. Nevertheless, we think it is part of our role to push RBKC to be the best it can be.

CONCLUSION

Our Terms of Reference from July 2017 asked us to provide assurance to you as Secretary of State that the council was able to deliver recovery from the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

In doing this work, we have noticed that the ‘law of diminishing returns’ has now come into play. After two and a half years the support and challenge we provide to RBKC is sometimes welcome and sometimes not.

Our overarching conclusion is that whilst there has been progress against all of the recommendations, they are not yet fully implemented. Our role is to support and challenge the council to deliver the recovery: it is for the council itself to drive these changes. There has been significant progress in re-housing, stronger programme management and leadership has improved. The Council has further to go in demonstrating pace, changing its culture and improving its relationship with the wider community. We have also noted that some of the improvements needed, particularly continuing to change the culture and embedding it across the council, will take time.

We would be happy to discuss any aspects of this report with you further should you wish.

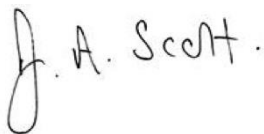
Yours sincerely,



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