



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Faculty of Public Health Grenfell Tower Inquiry Terms of Reference consultation submission

Introduction

The Faculty of Public Health works collaboratively with others to promote health and prevent illness, injury, and premature death. An important element of our practice is to look beyond the immediate causes of premature death to identify the causes of these causes, so that these can be addressed collectively through *organised efforts of society*.

The Faculty of Public Health recognises the challenging task faced by the Inquiry and we wish to offer our expertise, sensitively and constructively, for the benefit of the Grenfell community and to enable the Inquiry to reach its conclusions, speedily and accurately, based on the best available evidence.

We believe the terms of reference for the Grenfell Tower Disaster should be cast widely, to recognise the immediate problems of emergency response, but also to understand potential problems of building design, construction and regulation, housing policy and public resource allocation, and any other factors which may underpin these causes. To do otherwise would be to disrespect, and to fail to learn from the unimaginable suffering of the victims and their families, their neighbours, and their community.

We also note that the United Kingdom history of public inquiries, from Aberfan to Hillsborough, has not instilled public confidence. The people most affected by the disaster have often felt their voice has not been properly listened to by public services and judiciary. We believe this is an opportunity for the historic public mistrust of public inquiries to be overcome.

We suggest a two-stage inquiry so that the immediate lessons are learned as quickly as possible. The underpinning causes must then be explored in depth, as was the case with the Macpherson Inquiry.

1. What do you think the Inquiry should cover?

The inquiry should be a full public inquiry with evidence taken under oath and the inquiry able to order witnesses to attend by summons. It should examine:

- The adequacy of current fire safety regulations and Approved Document B and the impact of the delay to the formal review of these
- The impact of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which introduced a policy of fire risk self-assessment and the repeal of fire certificate legislation with oversight by the local fire authority

- The impact of the Design and Build procurement processes which result in the Lead Designer no longer being responsible for oversight of the design and the specification of materials and products from inception to completion of the project
- The appropriateness of current materials testing regimes and certification
- The competencies of building managers, inspectors and those specifying and approving modifications.

The Inquiry should also look at the adequacy of the response to the incident. This should include:

- The fitness for purpose of the fire escape plans at Grenfell Tower and how they were communicated to residents
- The appropriateness of the advice given to residents during the fire
- Whether current data protection regulations hindered the sharing of information between agencies and exacerbated the challenges of responding to survivors' needs
- Whether more could or should have been done to facilitate relatives in locating their loved ones
- The adequacy of the support and advice given to those affected in relation to housing, mental health, benefits and immigration status after the incident and how effectively it was communicated and administered by the Council, the Tenant Management Organisation, task forces, central government and any other relevant organisations. And given the known late onset of emotional distress, whether the public services been prepared and able to respond appropriately
- Whether the emergency services preparedness for, and response to the fire, was constrained though a lack of resources
- Whether changes in the local authority managerial relationships, between Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster, have been a factor in preventing adequate emergency preparedness and response by council services, including public health.

In addition the inquiry should seek to explore factors that underpin the immediate causes of this disaster. These could include, but not be limited to:

- The priorities and choices of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea with regard to housing and other public service investments, and other council funding decisions, and the extent to which these were subject to health, and/or equality impact assessment and whether they were ultimately choices which impacted on the likelihood of a major fire
- Levels of funding for local councils, housing associations and the fire service and whether these affect the services they can provide
- How the responsible authorities dealt with concerns of Grenfell Tower residents prior to the fire, and whether restrictions in legal aid prevented residents from advancing their case in the courts

- The adequacy and completeness of risk assessment arrangements, and how public concerns can inform local risk registers. The 2017 London Risk Register issued by the London Resilience Partnership did not include a fire in a high-rise building
- The use of outsourcing and subcontracting to deliver local government and housing responsibilities, including how widespread it is, why, and its impact on standards and accountability
- Whether Housing Standards in the public and private sectors are equivalent and fit for purpose.

2. Is there any type of evidence that you think is essential for the Inquiry to obtain?

- Evidence from successful approaches to fire safety used in other high income countries
- Evidence of effective approaches to mass evacuation from high-rise buildings in the event of fire, collapse or other impeding risks
- Information on the extent of inequalities in fire-related morbidity and mortality.

3. What should the Inquiry deal with in its interim report? What should be left for the main report, so the interim report can be published quickly?

The interim report should cover:

- The primary cause of the loss of life, and the strategic changes needed to prevent similar fires in the future
- The help needed to support those affected in both the short and long-term
- The adequacy or otherwise of the council's emergency response.

The main report should deal with any other contributory factors including:

- Detailed recommendations for a simple, accountable system of oversight of design, construction and monitoring to ensure compliance with building regulations that can respond to the use of novel and innovative construction materials and methods
- Detailed recommendations for any changes required to Building Regulations, Approved Documents, other relevant documents and current practices, and the establishment of clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

4. Would you like to be kept informed of the Inquiry's work? How would you like to be contacted?

Yes please via ruth.gelletlie@gmail.com

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August 2017