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Submissions to the Grenfell Inquiry on behalf of Lee Disson

Birnberg Peirce Ltd (BPL), who also instruct Michael Mansfield QC for the Grenfell Inquiry hearing on 11th & 12th December have kindly shared with me their submissions of 27th November & 3rd December, which are adopted by Lee Disson, for whom I have acted for many years, and whose father perished in this dreadful fire. The purpose of this note is not to repeat but to develop some of their content.

Lee Disson's interest in the Inquiry is to see that his father receives justice, and that others who may face similar risks do not pay with their lives too; avoiding risk to others is urgent, but Mr Disson will wait for as long as it takes for justice. He was not in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and now lives out of North Kensington; he has been deeply affected by the loss of his father, but is willing to give evidence if asked.

Lee Disson has asked me to include in this submission some observations I can make from long experience, which is intended to provide context, not evidence. I was one of a number of founders of the North Kensington Neighbourhood Law Centre in 1970, and had a criminal law practice locally for many years afterwards.

Local history

The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBK&C) has always had wealthy and poor areas side by side, but the overall political demographics favour the rich South Kensington and Chelsea areas, and not North Kensington. It is widely thought in North Kensington that the political demographics of RBK&C influence the allocation of necessary resources to it, and that money talks. In the 1960s, the notorious Peter Rachman was a local slum landlord who managed his property through violence, and there were so called race riots within sight of the present Grenfell Tower.

In the 1960s and 1860s, the then RBK&C Public Health Officers, in strikingly similar terms, blamed the poor housing conditions on immigrants; in the 1960s from Jamaica; in the 1860s from Ireland. The immigrants and refugees of today come from elsewhere in the world, but blaming immigrants and the poor for their environment is a continuing unhelpful theme. The poor state of repair of housing in North Kensington has been an issue over the years. There is a widely held belief amongst tenants of social housing, shared by Lee Disson, that the priority of Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) is to help RB&KC avoid expenditure on social housing, rather than raise the standard of housing.

Disclosure

There is a widely held belief, shared by Lee Disson, that the TV news coverage of the Grenfell fire already shows for all to see how the fire spread so widely and quickly.

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The TV coverage shows a building with its cladding on fire, lumps of flaming cladding falling down to the ground and flames from the burning cladding licking up several storeys, igniting the cladding above. The cladding is patently inflammable and played a decisive role in the spread of the fire.

The press have already unearthed a wealth of material about the history and effect of such flammable material being used, which points to possible underlying criminality, and the police investigating the fire have publicly included manslaughter in their list of offences being investigated.

Lee Disson does not want to prejudge any proceedings, particularly the fair trial of anyone allegedly criminally responsible, but that does not mean the Inquiry should ignore the existing signposts to the truth. It is foreseeable that the key evidence will come from effective disclosure by all those responsible for the repair of Grenfell Tower. The evidence of casualties and survivors is important in many ways, and Lee Disson strongly supports their voices being heard, but this is not likely to reveal how & why Grenfell came to be covered in flammable material with a chimney structure behind it. That will come from examination of the available email and document trails and financial material.

Inquiry lawyers have told the RLRs that they have asked those who likely hold relevant material to disclose it, some of whom have instructed independent disclosure agents. Mr Disson is disappointed to hear that those who are to make disclosure are arbiters of what they disclose; he considers this structure naïve; the instruction by them of unnamed disclosure agents is a wholly inadequate safeguard. He feels that there should be an urgent proactive approach to securing evidence, and guarding against cover up. The Inquiry has powers of compulsion and supervision which should be fully deployed to preserve the evidence.

The information available as to what documents have been acquired by who does not allow RLRs to make more detailed proposals regarding disclosure. We do not know what Police have seized at what time, which is highly relevant to what further steps the Inquiry should take. We have not been told of any protocols between police and the Inquiry. It is difficult for Mr Disson to have confidence in what is going on as matters stand. It may be unnecessary for RLRs to know the fine detail at this stage, but broadly they are in the dark, and know little about any protocols between the Inquiry and police.

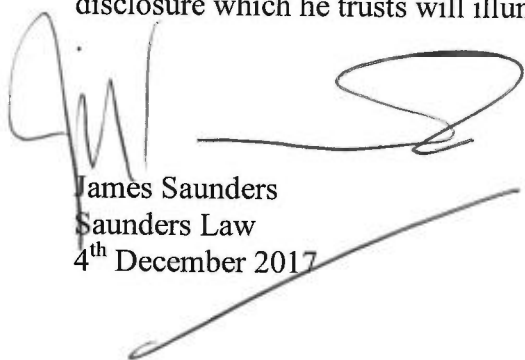
Mr Disson has to hope rather than know that police have been proactive in protecting material at an earlier stage, but he is aware of the incidence of cover up from Hillsborough and other public scandals, but that Police and Inquiries have worked in parallel on other occasions, finding appropriate paths forward.

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Community engagement

Deficits in disclosure may or not be capable of easy remedy at this late stage, but an effective and transparent approach to disclosure by the Inquiry is a necessary foundation of community confidence. Without this confidence, the community engagement may founder. Lee Disson welcomes the statement that the Inquiry values community engagement and participation, if that translates to anyone responsible for his father's death being exposed and brought to account.

Like many from North Kensington his confidence in the legal system is not unlimited, but he will actively support an effective Inquiry. He knows what a cover up looks like and is hoping not to see it allowed here. In the 6 months since his father's death he has received no help and not yet seen tangible evidence of an appetite to get to the truth by the Inquiry. He seeks tangible reassurance, not just words, as regards the disclosure which he trusts will illuminate the truth.



James Saunders
Saunders Law
4th December 2017