

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 11th September 2017, 7pm, Tooley Street

Statement response from Ledbury Action Group and Ledbury Estate Tenant & Resident's Association

In response to Gerri Scott (Strategic Direct of Housing & Modernisation's) 'Ledbury Estate Update; of 11th September 2017.

2. On 6th June 2017, several days before the tragic Grenfell fire, Southwark Council's Senior Building Surveyor; Peter Clarke visited a flat on the Ledbury Estate upon the request of the resident and assessed the severe cracks in that property as 'natural movement'. No fire risks were mentioned. This raises the question of how many other dangers have been reported across the borough and are not being acted upon?
3. Southwark Council inherited the Ledbury Estate from the GLC in 1982. Why have Southwark's own periodical structural appraisals over the past 35 years failed to pick up the cracks/fire risks and gas issues? The cracks have been reported for decades. Sajid Javid asked the same question in the House of Commons on 5th September stating 'Those cracks did not appear overnight. How can it be that the local authority was seemingly able to act only after the Grenfell tragedy? There are some really big questions for the local authority to answer.'
4. Southwark's Fire Safety department should be familiar with the full fire safety review promised after the Lakanal judgement. Why weren't the fire risks discovered at Ledbury sooner? How is it that Southwark's own assessments failed so drastically?
5. a) Cllr. Cryan recently confirmed that there were 16 flats still remaining on the Ledbury Estate that had not yet been assessed for cracks. Recent images shared by residents over the past few days show huge cracks, previously undiscovered, only being remedied now. The update report states that all flats now have enhanced fire alarm systems, though some residents state their alarms have *not* been checked. Why weren't all cracks identified and remedied weeks ago during the fire alarm works? Or alternatively when Southwark authorised forced entry to flats to switch off the gas supply? As such, to date, there are still serious fire risks present in the towers, and in the case of a fire, smoke would still have many open routes to spread from flat to flat rapidly.
b) Additionally, many of the remedial works carried out to cracks are starting to re-open. Including the works deemed a 'permanent solution'.
c) A false fire alarm at Peterchurch House on Friday 14th August was mishandled. Fire Marshals were not in place, there was no radio communications to raise the alarm.

Residents had to run to the TRA hall in person to alert staff. Dave Rowson; Southwark's Fire Safety Manager apologised, but the residents are left with little faith in the current fire safety arrangements.

6. The measures were not fully complied with as stated in (5)

11. Frequent reports from residents of miscommunication and bad attitude from some Southwark staff based at the TRA hall led to the Ledbury Action Group introducing 'Independent Observers' to accompany residents upon request, to seek information. The Ledbury Action Group were told, however, by staff at the TRA hall that their poster regarding Independent Observers would be removed as it was classed a 'flytipping' if they added it to the noticeboard. Such is just one example of the attitude of some staff there. Residents have been left in tears on many occasions. Residents have also expressed concern over the lack of privacy at the TRA hall where personal information is being discussed and shared in a large open room amongst many other people. Cllr. Cryan promised that she would address these matters, however, little has changed on the ground.

13. The letter from Southwark of 10th August has not been posted on the Ledbury Towers website. This letter has caused much confusion amongst residents as it stated that Southwark would be decanting in the coming weeks and months. The following letters directly contradict that and residents are still no clearer on whether they will be required to move or not.

14. ARUP made an error. They stated at the meeting of 11th July that Ledbury were Type 'B' tower blocks and they seemingly relied solely on the BRE report that stated inaccurately that the Commercial Way blocks were built in 1971. If either Southwark or ARUP had spoken to residents on the ground, they would have discovered that some residents have been living there since 1968. Are the Council still confident in ARUP?

18. What are the new structural implications given that ARUP have now discovered that no structural strengthening appears to have been carried out on the Ledbury towers as recommended by legislation following the Ronan Point disaster inquiry?

All the previous assessments & works were done on the assumption that strengthening **had** been done. The residents are calling for *urgent* interim reassessment of the building structure to be undertaken immediately. Residents are hugely concerned that large holes are currently being drilled through the floors for the new district heating system and electrical rising main *before* a new appraisal has been carried out. The risks of 'accidental damage' such as impact, high winds (as mentioned by Large Panel System expert Sam Webb) and fire are reportedly enough to cause progressive collapse. Additionally the ARUP report of 30th August worryingly states that *'this limited assessment has identified connection details that would require strengthening in order to enhance the margin of safety to where it needs to be for this type of building for future use, to bring within required limits the extent of damage that would be caused in the event of accidental damage to the structure.'* This would indicate that currently, the building is outside of the required limits. Are Southwark confident that they are prioritising resident safety?

21. Why were Category 4 Fire Risk Assessments only promised by Southwark following instruction from Arnold Tarling? Why didn't Southwark do these sooner?

22. Why was the gas issue only explored upon the instruction of independent experts; Arnold Tarling and Tony Bird, who were brought in by residents? Why didn't ARUP pick this up?

27. One resident attended Peckham Pulse to take a shower but the staff there had no idea of the arrangements made by Southwark.

28. a) How can Southwark make promises regarding major works and 'excellent' refurbishments before they've received the full ARUP report due on 20th November?

b) Southwark have not yet surveyed all the flats for potential gaps. The kitchens and bathrooms and entrance halls have not been inspected at all. Air gaps were found around the old gas risers in the kitchen cupboards by Arnold Tarling, directly connecting flat to flat all the way up the buildings. In order for Southwark to be thorough, they would need to inspect behind kitchen units, cupboards and in bathrooms and all other areas to ensure that there are no gaps there through which fire could spread.

32.a) The new immersion heaters have been leaking, causing misery to residents across the four towers. Many residents were told by the staff based at the TRA hall to call the Southwark Repairs Line to report these leaks. These delays meant in several cases, water got into the electrics, with lights blowing and fuses short-circuiting. One resident described smelling burning and smoke coming from her light fitting and being faced with having to move into temporary accommodation as a result. The contractors; Smyth & Byford, have told residents that 20 new immersion heaters a day (as promised by Southwark Council) is not viable and that they can install 10 per day maximum. Residents report up to 5 missed appointments for these installations, with many residents booking time off work to allow access.

b) The asbestos removal which has been carried out in recent weeks has been seemingly haphazard. Many residents have been in situ whilst asbestos was being removed. Inconsistent levels of safety equipment have been used.

34. Residents were told that the electricity supply would be upgraded by 6th September. The deadline has been missed. The choice and installation date of new cookers is still unclear.

37. Residents are already feeling cold. What happens if the district heating installation is also delayed?

40. a) Residents are reporting delays, some up to 4-5 weeks between viewing properties and being allowed to sign their new tenancies. Residents are asking that this process be sped up.

b) Some residents have been shown properties which are not in a fit state for viewing. Two residents (one accompanied by her young children) have been shown around former squats with drug paraphernalia laying around. Why are properties not visited by Southwark to ensure they are in a safe condition prior to viewings?

45. Again there is miscommunication taking place with the staff at the TRA hall. Information regarding rehousing is inconsistent.

46. Southwark have promised the 'Right to Return' for all tenants. However, legal advisors have informed tenants that if they move through the Band One 'Homesearch' system, they will not legally have the right to return. Will Southwark please immediately clarify all the terms and conditions attached to the 'Right to Return'.

50. Many residents feel that £20 a week is not sufficient and are asking that Southwark assess each individual households needs.

51. Southwark need to be clear and consistent with their terminology over the £5,800 payment. The update report refers to it as a 'Disturbance payment' – which is something entirely different.

The legal advice given is that this is a '*Discretionary Home Loss Payment*' – It's important that it's referred to by its correct name as to not cause confusion. It's also important that it's classed as 'Discretionary' – otherwise the Right to Return would legally be affected.

52. Will Southwark let residents know exactly what they are entitled to claim for, how they go about it, who they need to speak to and what information needs to be provided? Gerri Scott stated at the meeting on 23rd August that cash is available for residents at the TRA hall for electricity top-up. One resident, upon attending the hall, was told that she would need to speak directly to her housing officer about this, who was on holiday for several weeks.

53. Residents are unhappy to be paying full rent whilst living under these conditions and again are urging Southwark for a rent freeze.

54. Residents request a named Project Manager to be present onsite to oversee all matters. The SDHM should be keeping the Ledbury Action Group and the TRA informed on the daily briefing meetings, with an opportunity for us to feed back any pressing matters as well.

Residents additionally would like to know more about the investigation promised by Cllr. Cryan regarding the historical issues relating to the towers and how this happened. Residents would like to know what form is the investigation taking, who will be carrying it out and when will it be released?

Residents are recommending that the Ledbury Estate be included in the future agendas of the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Committee.

Many thanks

Ledbury Action Group and Ledbury Estate Tenants and Residents Association

(Ledbury Action Group: www.LedburyEstate.com)