

Survivors, SEP member denounce police inaction over Grenfell Tower fire at latest community public meeting

Paul Mitchell
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The fifth Grenfell Tower fire “community public meeting” was held Wednesday evening at Notting Hill Methodist Church.

It was convened by the Grenfell Response Unit, set up by Theresa May’s Conservative government to supposedly keep survivors and local residents informed of the measures being taken by the Metropolitan Police and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council (RBKC) in the aftermath of the inferno.

Instead, the meeting confirmed that, eight weeks after the fire, few of the promised measures have materialised and that survivors and local residents continue to be treated with contempt. One after another, those in attendance spoke of the lack of help given to those with health problems and the failure to provide decent housing.

One survivor described the appalling impact of having seen “dead bodies, people jumping for their lives and children screaming.”

A local resident close to the tower explained, “I’m traumatised, my kids are traumatised. The Red Cross is a disgrace. I’ve emailed for help twice and got my MP [member of parliament] too, but still there is no response.”

Another said, “I live 40 yards from the tower and have been suffering chest problems from the air pollution since. Knowing that there was asbestos and cyanide, why was no one evacuated?”

A survivor said, “Before this fire, I was working, supporting myself, looking after my sick uncle who has mental health problems and physical health problems, as well as working... But since the fire I haven’t been eating properly, I haven’t been sleeping properly. I have mental health problems now.”

Another member of the audience related how so many people had been complaining to local general practitioners about breathing problems that it had become known as the “Grenfell cough.”

A woman stood up to apologise for not coming to previous meetings, explaining that she had been “burying my two dead lost relatives.”

“I was lucky to get my relatives back. But there are many who haven’t got them back. The police one-to-one [sessions] are just not working,” she concluded.

Another resident asked, regarding the “assistance” being offered, “Is Reiki an adequate substitute for having decent housing for children living in hotel rooms? Why is it taking so long to rehouse them? Forget about Reiki! Forget about yoga! Why aren’t the council providing housing and decent, adequate services?”

“You talk about a tragedy. It is an avoidable disaster. You have blood on your hands. You’re an absolute disgrace,” she told the panel.

Judy Bolton, a local resident who lost her uncle, told RBKC leader Elizabeth Campbell, “You should be so ashamed of yourself. You have no understanding or respect for these people in this tower and this community.

“Let me explain why: You say it’s a tragedy, it’s a disaster. This is an atrocity and it’s an atrocity that all of these people here today have said ‘We’re not getting help... our children are in one bedroom.’ This is two months on.

“My daughter goes to school and she comes home and says ‘Mum, there are empty desks in my classroom.’ We’re living with this every day. If you’re coming to this meeting, come prepared, come with a

strategy, come with answers. Do not fob us off.”

Another speaker described the support provided for young people by the Grenfell Assistance Centre at the local Curve building as “disgraceful.” The Centre, according to the gov.uk website, is supposed be providing “housing needs, emergency funds, health, social care services, experienced volunteers from the Red Cross and other organisations, food and above all, a kind and sympathetic team of people ready to provide advice on anything.”

The speaker described how young people are “broken, grieving, hurt and want answers.”

Campbell’s condescending and supercilious response to questions about the failure to provide homes—“We’re starting viewings again next week... It’s a slower process than you would have wished for... We’re getting there... We have a timeline... We have a strategy”—were shouted down.

Survivors of the fire replied, “This is a humanitarian crisis and you don’t have any plan;” “You’re not helping anyone and blame the survivors for not accepting the first thing they are given;” “It’s two months and you can’t give a simple answer. You can’t even be prepared for this meeting;” “You keep coming back saying ‘I do not know, I cannot give any guarantees.’”

This reporter addressed the meeting. Introducing myself as a member of the Socialist Equality Party, I noted, “Just like Theresa May’s Public Inquiry these meetings are a cynical damage limit exercise. They are a fraud...

“Those who have attended in good faith have time and again heard representatives of the police insist that nothing can be revealed about the investigation and refuse to explain why no one has yet been questioned under caution, let alone arrested.

“To add insult to injury the Met’s ‘Gold Command’ are joined by representatives of the very organisation they should be investigating!”

I urged those in the meeting, “All the excuses being handed down as to why the guilty have not been arrested, we should reject them. Anyone who reads the national newspapers and watches the news knows that there is a cast-iron case for the prosecution. Indeed, if this level of evidence existed for the likes of us accused of the pettiest crime, we would already be sitting in jail...

“The central lesson of events since the Grenfell fire is that nothing genuine and lasting can be accomplished through the good graces of the Conservative government, the council, the Met or the Labour Party opposition. Labour councils are carrying out social cleansing just the same as this one is.”

To applause I concluded, “Everything depends on the survivors, local residents and the entire working class taking an independent stand.”



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