

Grenfell fire inquiry delayed for another six months

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The publication of the first report from the Grenfell fire inquiry has been delayed until at least October this year, nearly two and a half years after the devastating fire which claimed 72 lives.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick, chairman of the inquiry, had previously stated that his initial conclusions from the first phase of the inquiry would be ready this spring. However, core participants in the inquiry—including survivors of the fire and relatives of those who died—were informed in a letter on May 17 that the inquiry was running behind schedule by several months.

According to the letter, writing the report “has proved to be a far more complex and time-consuming task than the inquiry had originally anticipated.”

“There is a significant volume of evidence to be reviewed and detailed work to be done to ensure findings are properly tied to all relevant parts of the evidence,” it continued. “The chairman is seeking to complete the report as soon as possible but needs to ensure he does not compromise its thoroughness and accuracy.”

Claims that the delays to the inquiry are about ensuring “thoroughness and accuracy” are bogus, and part of a well-rehearsed charade which has been played out ever since the inquiry was commissioned by Prime Minister Theresa May one day after the fire.

The inquiry has been repeatedly pushed back, with initial assurances that an interim report would be presented in the months after the fire. This was reneged on. A pledge that there would be a report produced by Easter last year was scrapped as hearings did not even begin until June 2018. Supposedly insurmountable barriers to the efficient progression of the inquiry are repeatedly thrown up to justify endless delays and to avoid any conclusions being drawn.

Hearings for the first phase concluded in December last year, more than a year after its first session in September 2017. As the first stage was closed, it was announced that the second round of hearings would likely not take place until the end of 2019 or the start of 2020.

The latest letter to survivors stated that the second phase was still due to go ahead in January 2020. Given that every estimate made so far by the inquiry in relation to timings has been miles out, this is far from certain.

In response to news of the delay, Natasha Elcock, chairwoman of Grenfell United, a group for survivors and bereaved families, stated, “It’s disgraceful the inquiry have underestimated the complexity of the evidence that was produced in Phase 1 and have further delayed the report until autumn.

“That we are only finding this out now, when we were expecting the report to be published ahead of the two-year anniversary, shows how they continue to disregard survivors and bereaved through this process.”

The announcement came only days after survivors of the fire and bereaved families criticised the progression of the inquiry and its format in a report by the Inquest charity. The report, “Family reflections on Grenfell: no voice left unheard,” included contributions from families of 55 of the 72 victims of the fire.

Survivors condemned the inquiry for not listening to their concerns and branded the approach of the private corporations and public authorities who gave evidence in the first phase as “disrespectful,” criticising their “lack of candour.”

The families denounced the contempt shown by these organisations, which, knowing that the inquiry is no threat to the political and corporate criminals whose actions turned Grenfell into a death trap, denied any

responsibility or claimed ignorance.

One contributor to the report said, “The bereaved and families from our side who went up to give evidence had an extraordinary level of recollection.

“In comparison the corporate entities had an amnesia fix. The chair should have been stronger to say, ‘you have to try and recall’.”

Another respondent noted that the inquiry had failed to hold any of the guilty parties to account, stating, “It feels like certain people are being let off the hook, not being asked important questions. Now the first phase is finished. We don’t feel satisfied.”

The Inquest report also criticised the inquiry for not having produced any interim fire-safety recommendations, branding it a “farce.” Many core participants were “left questioning the effectiveness of an inquiry that is failing to recommend life-saving changes as early as possible.”

The criticisms of survivors and the bereaved of the inquiry point to the growing recognition of its fraudulent nature and disillusionment with the entire process. However, Inquest’s response is to merely suggest ways to fine-tune the procedure, including by diversifying the inquiry panel and re-examining the procedures for questioning witnesses.

Deborah Coles, director of Inquest, said in a statement, “It is high time the inquiry team and the Government listened to these voices and provide an inclusive and truthful inquiry that delivers structural change and accountability, adding, “This should be the lasting legacy of Grenfell.”

The notion that the inquiry can be tweaked—including by having a few new faces on a panel advising Moore-Bick—in order to achieve justice for the victims of the fire is bankrupt. The inquiry was never aimed at bringing justice and establishing the truth. Right from the beginning, Moore-Bick insisted on excluding all issues of a “social, economic and political nature” from the inquiry, which would instead be “limited to the cause, how it spread, and preventing a future blaze”—so providing “a small measure of solace.”

Asked at the outset about prosecuting the guilty, Moore-Bick said an “inquiry is designed to find out what happened. I have no power [under the 2005 Inquiries Act] to do anything in relation to criminal responsibility.”

As many of the survivors and bereaved have noted,

nothing of any substance has been told to the inquiry by the leaders of the Conservative-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council and its Tenant Management Organisation—who managed Grenfell on their behalf—or by the various heads of the corporations whose collective decisions turned Grenfell into a death trap by shrouding the tower, as part of a cost-cutting “refurbishment,” in highly flammable cladding.

Almost two years since the fire not a single person has been arrested in relation to the deaths of 72 people in the middle of London. Nor are any likely to be if the ruling elite and its institutions get their way. Just two months ago—before the latest six-month delay was announced by Moore-Bick—London’s Metropolitan Police confirmed they will not even consider pressing any charges regarding the deaths until “the latter part of 2021.” They justified this by citing the need to wait for the government inquiry into Grenfell to complete its business.

Instead of tinkering with the set-up of the inquiry, the whole rotten charade must be opposed. All those culpable in the crime of social murder at Grenfell Tower must be arrested, charged and brought to justice.

The Socialist Equality Party and Grenfell Fire Forum call on survivors and relatives, the local community and all those seeking justice for Grenfell to end all collaboration with the inquiry and demand that criminal prosecutions begin immediately.

For further information visit
facebook.com/Grenfellforum



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact