

Metropolitan Police arrest first person in relation to Grenfell inferno after 40 months

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Over 40 months after the Grenfell Tower fire, London's Metropolitan Police revealed Sunday that they had arrested the *first person* in relation to the inferno which claimed 72 lives on June 14, 2017.

In a statement of just 63 words, the Met said "On Saturday, 24 October, a 38-year-old man was arrested in the Sussex area on suspicion of perverting the course of justice in relation to the Met's Grenfell Tower investigation. He was taken to a local police station and has since been released under investigation."

The Met launched its criminal investigation into the fire the day after it took place, with Met Commander Stuart Cundy stating "as the police, we investigate criminal offenses. I am not sitting here and saying there are criminal offenses that have been committed, that's why you do an investigation."

But to all intents and purposes the Met's "investigation" was shelved, with not a single arrest made of anyone in political or corporate circles, despite a mass of evidence pointing to the guilty parties.

It wasn't until after 13 months after the fire, in July 2018, that the Met announced they had carried out a grand total of three interviews under caution in relation to the fire. No information about the identity of these individuals or what they had been questioned in relation to was ever made public.

In a statement, the Met said that conducting these interviews marked a "new phase" in their investigation. More interviews were "likely" to be conducted in the coming weeks and months, they declared. Nothing else was heard about its investigation until last September, when the London Fire Brigade confirmed that they had been interviewed under caution by the Metropolitan Police.

Not one more interview is likely if the ruling elite and its institutions get their way. In March, the Met confirmed that they will not even consider pressing any charges regarding the Grenfell 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.

Guardian reported in June that "Criminal charges are not now expected to be even considered until 2022" by the Met. It was reported in January that the police's own study of the Inquiry's final report may take until 2025— eight years after the fire. Given this situation, it is possible that a decade may pass since the fire before the police make any decisions.

The news of the first arrest followed another week of testimony at the Grenfell Inquiry, in which further criminality in relation to the fire was revealed.

Claire Williams, project manager for the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), admitted last Monday that she destroyed two or three notebooks dating back to 2013 relating to her work on the Grenfell Tower 2014-2016 refurbishment. KCTMO managed the Tower on behalf of the Conservative-run Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council (RBKC). Her revelation follows last week's announcement by her former colleague, Peter Maddison, that he had retained eight daybooks and five diaries totaling some 300 pages which he had not declared either to the Inquiry or the police.

Williams told the Inquiry, "I left the TMO in May 2018 and I binned all of them but the last one." "I think I just tidied up the desk. ...There was nothing underhand about it. I was clearing my desk, I looked and decided that everything that was in there was formally represented in minutes or other paperwork and it was of little value."

This had even the government's handpicked stooge and Inquiry chair, Sir Martin Moore-Bick asking, "You binned them even though you knew, by that time, there was already on foot a public inquiry?"

In response, a spokesman for the Met, who already have enough evidence to prosecute any number of wrongdoers over Grenfell, declared, "If relevant documentation has been disposed of or withheld from the criminal investigation, the MPS [Metropolitan Police Service] will seek to establish the facts and assess whether a criminal offense may have been committed."

The Met was keen to confirm in its Sunday statement that "The arrest was not made in relation to the events heard at

the Grenfell Tower Inquiry this week.”

Williams was questioned further on Tuesday, regarding her compilation of fire safety information that should have been completed toward the end of the Grenfell refurbishment in April 2016. A risk assessment at the time identified a “high priority” need to gather a wide range of safety documentation under Regulation 38 to ensure efficient future safety assessments and management. She recalled receiving information on a memory stick from contractor Rydon, but told the inquiry, “I can’t say hand on heart that I checked it exactly.”

Expert witness Dr. Barbara Lane concluded, “None of the relevant sections was fully completed with the relevant fire safety information and a substantial quantity of the provided content... was insufficient to assist the responsible person to operate and maintain the building with reasonable safety.”

Williams maintained that the former Rydon project manager Simon Lawrence had assured her the cladding used on Grenfell tower would not burn. Lawrence has denied this. Asked why there was no assurance of this in an email sent to residents on the morning of the fire, Williams said she was “directed as to what information we needed to provide” and that “there were other things that were going on.”

The Inquiry heard the previous week of “offline” meetings held between the TMO and contractor Rydon before the latter’s bid to refurbish the tower was accepted, in violation of European regulations. The switch from zinc-based cladding to the deadly aluminium composite material (ACM)—which caused the fire to spread out of control in a matter of minutes—saved the profiteers involved £293,368.

In addition to residents’ blogs, one of which—the Grenfell Action Group—predicted the fatal fire, no less than 29 tenants complained to either the KCTMO or Rydon about badly-fitted windows and faulty fire doors.

The resident in the flat on the fourth floor where the fire started had reported drafts, personally telling builders of the gaps between his window frames. According to an expert report, it was these gaps which allowed the original spread of the fire from the kitchen to the flammable cladding outside.

On Tuesday, Williams was confronted with her witness statement alleging “disruptive conduct [in 2013] from a small number of residents at public meetings.” She explained her fear that a few might “stop the rest of the group from hearing the information you are trying to get across.” On this basis, the TMO dropped all public meetings, switching to drop-in opportunities and newsletters.

Nearly three and a half years after the fire, hundreds of thousands continue to live in unsafe high-rise housing. This was forcefully brought home last Monday when 858 tenants, most of them students, were suddenly ordered to evacuate

from the Paragon Estate in Brentford, west London. The property, now owned by Notting Hill Genesis (NHG), stands next to the M4 motorway. It contains 1,059 homes, in six blocks ranging from 4-17 storeys, and houses 688 students from the University of West London (UWL) and Imperial College London (ICL). Some were moved to hotels, others to student halls. Dozens are self-isolating with COVID-19.

Residents were given no reason for their sudden eviction, only hints that it was related to safety concerns prompted by the Grenfell fire. NHG executive Kate Davies stated, “This is a complex situation and we don’t yet have all the answers.” The housing association reported, “Earlier building performance issues, together with fire safety issues related to the cladding and the subsequent new government guidance since the fire at Grenfell Tower, triggered a series of safety checks at Paragon undertaken by technical consultants, which have each revealed further problems with this development.”

Many students were terrified. They were not told of any concerns when they moved in last month, despite NHG’s awareness of fire safety issues at least since December 2017, including missing fire breaks in the cladding system which could allow a fire to spread across floors.

Eleanor Willis, studying acting at UWL, recalled, “When it comes to fire safety, we were not given a fire briefing. I remember one time when it was the middle of the night, and there was a fire alarm that went off and obviously all of us vacated, but there was not one member of staff to guide us in any way, shape or form.”

UWL business studies student Laura Howes, who recently emerged from self-isolation after testing positive for COVID-19, said, “I know they are panicking, but... obviously they’ve been going through the safety checks for months. If they knew that there was a potential need to vacate, this should have been thought out.”

All those culpable in the crime of social murder at Grenfell Tower must be immediately arrested, charged, and brought to justice.

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