

## **INQUEST Parliamentary Briefing: Grenfell Debate**

Main Chamber, House of Commons, 21 January 2020 at 11.30am

The Grenfell Tower Fire happened 31 months ago. The worst preventable disaster this country has seen in decades. 72 men women and children lost their lives. A public inquiry was announced the very next day by the Prime Minister. On 30 October 2020, over ten months after the Grenfell Inquiry concluded hearing evidence in Phase One, the Inquiry published the Phase one report. Phase two of the Inquiry is due to begin on 27 January 2020.

### **INQUEST and the families we support are asking MP's to demand;**

- The establishment of a **'National Oversight Mechanism'** with the power to oversee and implement recommendations arising from post death investigations, inquiries and inquests.
- The Government and Inquiry team **listen to the voices of bereaved families.**
- The reintroduction of **The Public Authority [Accountability] Bill.**

### **1. National Oversight Mechanism**

Every family INQUEST works with speaks of the overriding need for change to ensure others do not go through what they have been through. The Grenfell bereaved, survivors and residents, whilst grieving and traumatised, have been consistently campaigning for change as they have put saving the lives of others to the forefront of their minds. The Government response has been lacking and this is simply not good enough. Thirty-one months on, thousands still live in unsafe homes, confused about whether to 'stay put' should a fire break out.

The Grenfell Inquiry phase one report published on 30 October 2019 made **46 evidence-based recommendations** and these life-saving recommendations simply must be acted upon. Following the Lakeland House fire inquests, the coroner made recommendations for change which were not implemented. The current reality is; recommendations are not monitored or followed up in any systematic way. This means that dangerous practices endure, and lives continue to be needlessly lost. **This must change.**

INQUEST have written to the Inquiry chair, Sir Martin Moore Bick, to ask if he will use his discretion to seek regular feedback on the progress of his recommendations during the duration of the Grenfell Inquiry.

There is an overwhelming case for the creation of a National Oversight Mechanism – and new independent body - tasked with the duty to collate, analyse and monitor learning and implementation arising out of all Article 2 State related deaths. This body must be accountable to parliament and provide a role for bereaved families and community groups to voice their concerns. A systemic approach of implementing recommendations from these post death investigations **must be centralised** and rolled out nationally rather than locally or regionally.

## 2. The voices of bereaved families

In May 2019, INQUEST released, [\*Family reflections on Grenfell: No voice left unheard\*](#), providing invaluable insight into the experiences of bereaved families. INQUEST organised a family consultation day, the first-time families have come together to reflect on their experiences. Fifty five of the 72 families who died contributed to the report. This evidence-based report is filled with their first-hand testimonies and details the shared frustrations and anger experienced following the Grenfell Tower fire. They reflect on the chaos and lack of organisation in the aftermath of the fire and are critical of the Government response at both a local and national level.

Bereaved families also voice their serious concerns with the Inquiry process including the uncertain time frames, unsuitable venue, lack of urgent interim recommendations, disclosure of evidence, frustrations that lawyers cannot question witnesses directly and the lack of candour.

### **Family recommendations for the Inquiry moving forwards:**

1. Meaningful consultation on the venue facilities and layout ensuring families are at the heart of proceedings and not mere bystanders;
2. Re-examination of procedures for questioning witnesses to enable family lawyers to directly ask questions;
3. Adoption of a duty of candour by public authorities and public entities;
4. Seminars to un-pick technical jargon;
5. Advance notice of hearings and prompt disclosure of legal papers;
6. Better support for families whose first language is not English;
7. Support for employers enabling families to take time off work without losing annual leave entitlement.

### 3. The Public Authority Accountability Bill

INQUEST propose the reintroduction of the Public Authority (Accountability) Bill, previously tabled in March 2017. The Bill, originally sponsored by Hillsborough families, calls for a duty of candour from state and private bodies, and public funding for legal representation to put victims on a level playing field with public bodies. The Bill would:

*“Set a requirement on public institutions, public servants and officials and on those carrying out functions on their behalf to act in the public interest and with candour and frankness; to define the public law duty on them to assist courts, official inquiries and investigations; to enable victims to enforce such duties; to create offences for the breach of certain duties; to provide funding for victims and their relatives in certain proceedings before the courts and at official inquiries and investigations; and for connected purposes.”*

#### **About INQUEST**

INQUEST is the only charity providing expertise on state-related deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, advice and support agencies, the media and parliamentarians.

Our policy, parliamentary, campaigning and media work is grounded in the day to day experience of working with bereaved people. INQUEST’s specialist casework focuses on deaths in police and prison custody, immigration detention, mental health settings and deaths involving multi-agency failings or where wider issues of state and corporate accountability are in question such as, Hillsborough and the Grenfell Tower fire. INQUEST’s Executive Director, Deborah Coles, sits on the cross-government Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody.

INQUEST regularly consults with bereaved families and the INQUEST Lawyers Group. We organise listening days to ensure that the voices of the bereaved are heard directly, on their experiences of investigative and inquest/inquiry processes.

INQUEST coordinates the Grenfell INQUEST Lawyers Group, consisting of lawyers representing those bereaved by the Grenfell Tower fire.

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## Grenfell Inquiry Timeline

<b>14 June 2017</b>	The Grenfell Tower Fire.
<b>15 June 2017</b>	Prime Minister announces a Public Inquiry into the disaster.
<b>29 June 2017</b>	Sir Martin Moore Bick appointed as Inquiry Chair.
<b>5 July 2017</b>	Inquiry launch consultation for Terms of Reference – this deadline was extended twice and closed on 4 August 2017.
<b>15 August 2017</b>	Terms of Reference announced.
<b>14 September 2017</b>	Formal opening of the Inquiry.
<b>3 November 2017</b>	Petition is launched by bereaved families calling for an independent diverse decision-making panel for the Inquiry.
<b>22 December 2017</b>	Prime Minister confirms she will not appoint a panel for the Inquiry.
<b>23 February 2018</b>	Petition for a panel reaches 100,000 signatures as public and legal pressure mounts.
<b>11 May 2018</b>	Prime Minister announces decision to appoint two panel members but only for Phase Two of the Inquiry.
<b>21 May 2018</b>	The Public Inquiry opens with Commemoration hearings at the Millennium Hotel in Gloucester Road.
<b>4 June 2018</b>	Oral hearings for Phase One of the Inquiry begin at Holborn Bars.
<b>12 December 2018</b>	Oral hearings for Phase One of the Inquiry end.
<b>30 May 2019</b>	Two panel members appointed for Phase Two.
<b>30 October 2019</b>	Inquiry publishes Grenfell Phase One report
<b>27 January 2020</b>	Phase Two of the Inquiry is due to begin at Bishops Bridge Road, Paddington.