Dear Mary,

Thank you for your letter dated 21 May 2019. I was surprised and somewhat disappointed to read your press release stating that the Council had “taken no action” before we had an opportunity to respond. I hope that you find the following answers instructive.

_What steps have Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council taken to reassure and address environmental contamination in soil around the Grenfell Tower site? Has the Council consulted with DEFRA on this issue?_

We as a large authority appreciate that we have a duty of care and environmental health responsibilities. However, we are reliant on qualified scientific experts to ensure that tests are thorough and properly conducted.

Since July 2017, Public Health England (PHE) has commissioned monitoring of air quality in the area around the Tower. PHE have advised the Council and the wider public that the risk to people’s health from air pollution is low - and has remained low since monitoring began.

No asbestos has been detected as a result of PHE’s monitoring, levels of particulate matter remain low, and monitoring results for dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are broadly equivalent to background level.

The Council’s public health risk assessment immediately after the fire, informed by advice from PHE, was that risks to health were best monitored through air quality monitoring as any substances entering the soil would come through the air.

Acknowledging our residents’ concerns and to provide peace of mind, the Council offered to change the top layers of soil in any beds on the estate used for vegetables or culinary purposes, and soil in planters or tubs in communal gardens in any of the blocks we manage. In recent months we have done this for a number of blocks on request, however will not do so proactively as we have not been advised that this is required or indeed medically beneficial.
In terms of undertaking our responsibility as a landlord, we provide housing-related advice and remedial improvements to any resident who has health concerns that they believe might be exacerbated by indoor air quality in their home, in terms of allergies, condensation, mould etc. Cyclical cleaning, window cleaning and jet washing has been undertaken across all blocks in the 23 months since the tragedy, and over 300 properties have had deep cleans undertaken to date.

In response to community concerns, the Council has worked with Government to establish a new testing programme for soil alongside continuing existing air monitoring. The Government is now managing a two-stage programme of additional environmental checks. Stage 1 has commenced and involves a site survey, an initial risk assessment, initial exploratory sampling and identifying historical sources of pollution. It will then inform a wider sampling programme at Stage 2.

This work is overseen by an expert Multi-Agency Partnership which includes Kensington and Chelsea Council, the Environment Agency, Public Health England and NHS England. The Partnership will make sure soil surveying around Grenfell Tower is comprehensive and that the analysis is provided to the public.

Additionally, the Government Chief Scientific Adviser has established an independent Science Advisory Group to quality-check the scientific methodology, testing process and analysis of results at each stage of the environmental testing programme.

This is a very complex and specialist matter and the Council is grateful to have the advice of the country’s experts on this subject, both within DEFRA, the Environment Agency and beyond. Once the results of the checks programme are received, the Council will consider the findings and take appropriate action.

**What steps have Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council taken to address environmental contamination in homes around the Grenfell Tower site?**

See the response to the previous question.

**Apart from issuing guidelines on cleaning, what assistance has been provided to residents around the Grenfell Tower site to remove instances of environmental contamination from their homes?**

Until the testing programme is complete we will not know if there is environmental contamination.

Immediately after the fire we offered a deep clean to our residents to provide additional reassurance, and we have completed just over 300 of these.

Once the results of the checks programme are received, the Council will consider the findings and take appropriate action.

On 30 June 2017, Public Health England issued health advice as follows:
The majority of debris in surrounding areas consists of charred foam insulation and this material is unlikely to present an immediate risk to people’s physical health, however as a precaution, residents are advised not to handle any burnt material. Dust on windowsills or outside areas of homes can be safely removed by damp dusting or wiping with a wet cloth whilst wearing gloves.

If any residents had waste material or debris from the fire at their property, PHE gave a contact at the Council to make arrangements for this to be collected, and the Council did so where requested.

**Why has a deep clean of ventilation systems in homes around the Grenfell Tower site not taken place?**

The only ventilation systems in homes on the Lancaster West estate are primarily designed to take humidity out of bathrooms and do not recirculate air into properties.

The independent air quality monitoring commissioned by PHE has shown the risk to people’s health from additional air pollution caused by the fire around the Grenfell Tower site to be consistently low. Like many parts of London, air quality around Grenfell can be affected by pollution due to heavy traffic and gas-fired boilers.

**Following Hammersmith and Fulham Council’s decision to test for contaminants at the Edward Woods estate, are Kensington and Chelsea Council planning any similar soil testing?**

As stated above, the Council is engaged with the testing programme being overseen by the Multi-Agency Partnership, and with expert input from the Science Advisory Group.

I trust that this provides you the reassurance that we are doing all we can to address our residents’ concerns as we continue to take advice not only from Public Health England but also from the Science Advisory Group.

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth

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