

Transcript downloaded from you tube (time stamps removed) of Elizabeth Campbell addressing RBKC Council after Grenfell Testimony Week.

Video is here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QbavpAPktQ>

Madam Mayor,

It's been six and a half years since a fire at Grenfell ripped through people's homes and ripped families and lives apart. 72 wonderful people lost their lives, 18 children, including one yet to be born baby boy.

And the families and friends of the 72 still don't have justice. Still don't have answers.

They don't yet have an inquiry report to establish – in basic terms – what went wrong and what the country should do about it.

Last week, along with Kim, Maxine, and other senior colleagues from the Council, I attended every single day of Grenfell Testimony Week.

Many of you will have seen the reports from writers and broadcasters, but it is impossible for anybody to truly relay the emotion, the anger, the sadness, the searing truth so eloquently spoken by bereaved families and survivors.

I sat, and I listened. I felt ashamed. It was a reminder that this organisation is to blame for what happened, and we should continue to shoulder that blame every single day. And no matter what you think about companies gaming the system, a broken building safety regime or the response of the emergency services that night. None of that should matter to us.

We are a public authority, we should have a bar set high for us and we should be meeting the very highest bar.

Madam Mayor,

Testimony Week sits alongside our efforts to compensate families and victims, and to put in place a long-lasting fund for those in the local community.

However, six years on, it is clear that we are still not doing enough. People have a right to be angry.

I sat alongside anonymous lawyers and representatives throughout last week. One company failed to send anyone at all.

After fronting public meetings in the days after the fire, and the opening of the Inquiry, I know what happened. I've sat face to face with families and I have some understanding of how people feel. I'm glad that others in that room do now so too.

The one thing I want to make clear tonight, to them and to ourselves once again, it is not enough just to turn up. It is not enough just to listen. You have to take action.

For us, it is not enough if we don't complete a fundamental change of culture across the entire organisation.

For me, and I know for Maxine who joined us last year, it is not enough as I said just to turn up.

It is what we take from Testimony Week and what we do with it that counts.

I stood here in 2017 and I pledged that we would not forget. I haven't. But people are as companies are bought up by others or dissolved, as ministers and Governments change, and as people utter the words 'I cannot recall' time and time again.

I've always wanted this council to be a positive constant. Somewhere for bereaved and survivors to look to when they feel nobody is listening and nothing is changing.

But last week, I asked myself, have we done enough? The answer is no – but we must continue to try, and try harder.

If admission of failure feels uncomfortable – that is fine with me.

I am speaking from the heart. Unless we can collectively look at ourselves in the mirror and honestly say we are what bereaved and survivors have challenged us to be then we have failed.

Madam Mayor

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I'm only human, and I'd be lying if I didn't say last week was incredibly difficult, and I'm sure colleagues who were there feel the same.

It should feel difficult for us. It must take such courage to speak in those circumstances, to turn to representatives of organisations you know had a hand in the death of your loved ones and then tell them why Grenfell was so wrong.

It should not have happened. The tragedy should never have happened.

It is also clear that more change should have happened by now. For so many families, the clock has just stopped. Time is standing still.

The Inquiry must work faster. It must pull out all the stops. In turn, the police will be thorough, and of course they must look at all of their options and evidence.

But justice for Grenfell should have been swift and to date,

it has not been. This is an additional kick in the teeth on top of the tragedy itself. Just as the Hillsborough families had to wait, just as the Post Office workers had to wait, just like those who will now have to wait for conclusions from the covid inquiry.

The system doesn't work.

It is too stacked in favour of those who would like to forget, and the anger at the lack of action was palpable throughout last week. Palpable, and perfectly understandable.

Sure, it is uncomfortable when the finger is pointed in our direction with such raw emotion. But every single person delivered their message with dignity. I'm not sure how families managed to do it. I'm not sure I could, if faced with the same situation.

It demands respect, and demands attention.

Madam Mayor,

I am not going to stand here tonight and give a long list of the changes we've made as a Council. It doesn't take away the pain, the hurt. It doesn't bring families back together, or loved ones back to life. And frankly too often it is what politicians tend to do.

The evidence at the inquiry already chimes with what we heard last week. The council did not do enough before 2017. It didn't care enough. It wasn't inquisitive enough. We outsourced services, we outsourced caring, and we didn't listen to people who knew something was wrong.

Of course, I feel strongly that significant progress has been made, and we are a different organisation now to the one before 14 June 2017.

Our commitments, promises, and policies have been guided by what happened on that date. The continued investment and care we take in our social housing – listening to people who live here, being the first public sector organisation to be guided by the Hillsborough Charter through an inquiry process, and building social homes for the first time in a generation.

We are continually striving to become a leader in safety, after bringing our housing services back in house. Closer to us – never again at arms-length. And the dedicated service – the unique set of people in the council who we hope will show others the way.

But, Madam Mayor,

I am more aware than ever, that a lot of what we label as progress is too focused on process, paperwork, systems, contracts, commitments, and money spent. We still haven't done enough on the ground, face to face, where it matters. People don't need to be told about change, they need to see and feel the changes.

Grenfell. The opening to the inquiry. Last week. These are moments that have changed my life.

For as long as I am leader of this authority, we will never forgive ourselves, nor seek forgiveness, never pat ourselves on the back for what we do now, never think the job is done. There is not a time now, nor in the future, to simply move on.

Last week was a reminder of that for all of us here and our entire workforce – a message I will make sure gets through.

Grenfell has already shaped the future path of this organisation, but it is up to us to choose how we wish to walk down that path.

Madam Mayor, Colleagues,

Thank you for listening tonight. As you can tell, I am still incredibly moved by the events of last week – and I wanted to share these emotions and words with you. I feel it is one of the most important roles I have as leader.

But I will end with words of someone else tonight.

Sandra Ruiz, whose niece, Jessica Urbano Ramirez, died in the fire..., aged 12.

Leaders, she said, should be held to a higher level of accountability.

That means us. That means me.

Last week, the depth of grief, the hurt and the sorrow, the fury and the frustration, the raw pain and searing testimonies – especially about children – are all things I will never forget, and I will use it to drive me on, and we will use it to drive all of us on.

Thank you.