
INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES BEREAVED BY THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

For over 35 years INQUEST has provided free, confidential advice about contentious deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, community groups, lawyers and the voluntary sector. This means that we are uniquely placed to advise about the various investigations now taking place into the fire at Grenfell Tower.

We will work to try and ensure the legal processes underway deliver truth, justice and hold those responsible to account.

This leaflet aims to provide answers to some of the immediate questions we are hearing families ask. We also advise that you **seek legal advice from specialist lawyers as soon as possible** to protect your rights. We can help you to find the right lawyer, from our INQUEST Lawyers Group. For this and other advice, you can contact us at INQUEST:

Tel: 020 7263 1111

Email: inquest@inquest.org.uk

Web: www.inquest.org.uk

Please note we run an answering machine service to pick up queries if we are busy with other calls; if you leave a message we will call you back.

More detailed information can also be found in our INQUEST handbook. Enter the following web address into your internet browser: bit.ly/InquestHandbook

Will there be a criminal investigation?

The Metropolitan Police have opened a criminal investigation into the circumstances of the disaster. The police investigation may take some months to conclude. It will then be passed to the Crown Prosecution Service to make a decision as to whether any individual or organisation has committed any criminal offences arising from this disaster.

Will the police look at manslaughter charges?

The offences under consideration will include gross negligence manslaughter or corporate manslaughter. If the police/CPS consider that there is enough evidence, a trial will follow in the usual way. If they do not consider there is enough evidence, victims will have a right to a review of that decision.

Will there be a public inquiry?

The Government has announced a full public inquiry. Victims and survivors will be entitled to funding for legal representation to enable them to play as full a role as they wish. They will be given an opportunity to shape the inquiry's terms of reference.

The inquiry will hear evidence on oath and participants will be able to interrogate this evidence. It will be able to make interim findings which, among other things, is the quickest way of protecting residents in other blocks with similar construction issues.

Those who wish to play a role can apply to be "core participants". This includes people who played, or may have played, a "direct and significant role" in the

subject matter and those who have a "significant interest".

Core participants can apply to ask questions of any inquiry witnesses; make an opening and closing statement to the inquiry panel, and receive a copy of the Inquiry report.

Will the inquiry be independent?

We hope that with robust legal representation for those affected, an inquiry can meet the concerns of victims and survivors in terms of being independent and being able to make critical findings.

The earlier you seek legal representation the more likely it is that your voice will be heard.

To see our full statement welcoming a public inquiry, enter the following web address into your internet browser: bit.ly/GrenfellInquiry

What is an inquest?

An inquest is a fact finding investigation to establish who a person was and where, when and how they died. It is a legal procedure presided over by a coroner, sometimes with a jury.

The Coroner in this case is HM Senior Coroner Dr Fiona Wilcox of Inner West London Coroner's Court. The Coroner must also consider whether future deaths in similar circumstances can be prevented and can recommend changes are made. Hearings are held in open court and families can be represented.

When will an inquest happen?

As soon as a body is recovered and identified the Coroner will open an inquest. This normally involves a short hearing where the name, age and very brief details of deceased and a preliminary cause of death are read out in open court. There may be multiple

inquests opened at the same time. The Coroner will then adjourn the inquest for the criminal investigation and public inquiry to take place, as these must happen first.

Once the criminal investigation and inquiry are completed the Coroner will decide whether the inquests are necessary and should resume.

How do I report a missing person?

Queries about missing relatives should be put to the **Metropolitan Police casualty bureau** either in person at Westway Sports Centre in West London, or by calling the casualty bureau on **0800 0961 233**.

If you have reported a missing person and since been reunited you should also inform the casualty bureau.

The coroner will be informed of all deaths arising from Grenfell Tower. Where identification has been made the next of kin will be contacted by family liaison officers. If you have not been contacted after reporting a missing person it may be due to the difficulty of recovering and identifying those who have died. We understand this is hugely distressing for families with each day that passes. INQUEST is in contact with the Coroner's Court and casualty bureau and can help you with this.

Who has responsibility for my relative's body?

While various examinations are conducted, the Coroner has control of the body, and it cannot be released for funeral without her permission.

Queries about the release of the body and about the post mortem can be put to the **Coroner's office**. The number is **020 7802 4750**, but for the time being queries should be directed to the casualty bureau above.

Can I stop a post mortem taking place?

Post mortems are generally carried out very quickly. You should inform the coroner as soon as possible if you are opposed to a post mortem taking place so that alternatives can be considered. If the coroner decides a post mortem is not necessary she can release the body without one.

Can I view the body?

Generally, yes and arrangements are made through the coroner's office. In some circumstances, for instance where there are seriously disfiguring injuries, the coroner may suggest that the family should not view the body or that the way in which you view the body should be limited (for example, from behind a glass panel). It is up to you whether you take this advice. You should seek legal advice if you feel you are being prevented from seeing your relative's body.

Who should identify the body?

A family member or close friend can identify the body by sight but if that is not possible then alternative methods will be used such as fingerprinting or examining dental records or DNA samples.

Will the coroner recognise different cultural and religious beliefs and practices in relation to death?

It is important to inform the coroner about your beliefs and practices so that within the legal framework, they can be sensitive to your needs.

When can I make the funeral arrangements?

The funeral cannot take place until the coroner has agreed to release the body, but it may be helpful to contact a funeral director of your choice at an early stage. He or she will be able to give you practical help about making arrangements. You should retain all receipts in case costs can be reclaimed.

Do I need a death certificate?

A death certificate is a legal document that is sent to the Registrar of births and deaths, to record the details of a person who has died and the cause of death. The coroner will issue an interim certificate when the body is identified and released for a funeral to be held. You may need this for the administrative procedures that follow a death such as closing bank accounts, informing benefit agencies, obtaining probate etc.

What about my family's immediate needs in terms of housing and other support?

We are aware that a lot of organisations have been keen to help. North Kensington Law Centre are trying to co-ordinate these offers of help and to make sure that you get the advice you need about your housing needs, immigration situation, welfare benefits, or about your family's immediate financial needs. **Contact North Kensington Law Centre:** Unit 15, Baseline Studios, Whitchurch Rd, London W11 4AT. Call 020 8969 7473 or see www.nklc.co.uk.

What happens next?

The public inquiry and ongoing criminal investigations will take some time to conclude. These processes can be distressing and frustrating but we are available to provide support and advice.

FOR EXPERT ADVICE & HELP WITH
FINDING LEGAL REPRESENTATION
CONTACT US AT INQUEST:
TEL 020 7263 1111

