

New journalist of the year – Luke Barratt

FOI: No fire risk assessment since 2015

Luke's first full week employed as a journalist began on Monday 12 June. Two days later he found himself thrown head first into a breaking international news event: the rapidly emerging Grenfell Tower disaster.

Luke responded not by being cowed by this but by breaking several stories which set the national agenda, were reported all around the world and saw him appear on prime time television.

The most eye-catching was his ability to secure a Freedom of Information Act response on the morning of the fire showing its last recorded risk assessment was December 2015. He had previously been conducting research into fire risk assessments, and he noticed Kensington and Chelsea's response was outstanding. Chasing this up he secured a response and the scoop.

While he immediately went to them for a response, KCTMO later disputed the accuracy of the spreadsheet. The reason for this discrepancy is still unclear.

Fire safeguards in Grenfell were temporarily removed during refurbishment

His second scoop of the day came later that morning. After securing the fire risk assessment story, Luke turned his focus to the planning documents for the refurbishment of the tower.

These bore fruit. He discovered that fire safeguards between floors were removed during the refurbishment to fit new gas pipes in the building. These were supposed to have been replaced, but as TV images showed fire ripping through the building Luke's story threw the refurbishment even more keenly into the spotlight. He later appeared on BBC News to discuss the story.

While this story was 'out there' in the public domain, Luke was the first and only journalist to spot it. Doing so required a clear head in a rapidly developing news environment, the ability to quickly source and secure official documents and a razor-sharp news sense – in short the key skills of any good journalist.

Fire risk assessor for Grenfell revealed

Luke continued to sieve through documents, and on Friday broke the news that the risk assessor of the building had been appointed [on the basis of competitive price and a willingness to challenge the fire brigade over "excessive" requirements](#).

This attracted the attention of a source who advised Luke to search through specific KCTMO reports – revealing the name of the assessor as Carl Stokes. To confirm this, Luke secured his company address and travelled to Witney to confront him. Able only to speak to his accountant, he put the story to Mr Stokes and received a 'no comment' response. This allowed *Inside Housing* to exclusively name the risk assessor two weeks after the blaze – a scoop [later falsely claimed by the Daily Mail](#).

After publication, Luke received a comment from Mr Stokes' representatives which allowed him to [later break the news that Grenfell's cladding had not been risk assessed](#).

FOI: Grenfell Tower had not been risk assessed for 18 months

NEWS 14/06/17 12:46 PM BY LUKE BARRATT

Grenfell Tower has not been checked for fire safety for 18 months, data released by Kensington and Chelsea Council under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act shows.



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UPDATE: Inside Housing was contacted by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation at 14.30 on 23.6.2017. The organisation claims a full fire risk assessment was carried out in June 2016, after the refurbishment work was completed. However, this conflicts with the information in the council's documents, released to Inside Housing. The council was contacted ahead of publication to confirm the accuracy of the document, which it has not yet disputed.

According to the document, the last fire risk assessment for the building, which went up in flames in the early hours of this morning, took place in December 2015.

This was shortly after aluminium external wall cladding was added to the building for insulation purposes.

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Fire safeguards in Grenfell were temporarily removed during refurbishment



Government orders checks on tower block refurbis

Eyewitnesses have said this cladding burned during the fire, contributing to the spread of the blaze.

Of the 82 tower blocks managed by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), most have been checked more recently than Grenfell.

However, 15 blocks (defined as buildings with six or more storeys) have not been assessed in the past two years (see attached file). Most of these were six storey buildings.

Local councillor Judith Blakeman told Radio 4 this morning that the fire brigade had recently visited Grenfell Tower and declared it safe, and the BBC has reported that the tower received a fire risk assessment in June 2016, "immediately after a £10m refurbishment was carried out".

The information released by Kensington and Chelsea Council suggests that the assessment was in December 2015, and the last refurbishment was in 2015.

Grenfell Tower is the second-tallest building managed by KCTMO, at 24 storeys, after Trellick Tower, which is 31 storeys high. It received its last fire risk assessment in April this year.

In March, experts warned that government delays in reviewing fire regulations was putting tower blocks at risk.

At a board meeting of KCTMO in July 2016, the board determined – as part of its Health & Safety Action Plan – that it should "extend the fire safety approach adopted at Grenfell Tower to all major works projects".

Kensington and Chelsea has been contacted for comment.

In a statement posted on its website, the council said: "At present all our focus is on supporting the rescue and relief operation. The cause of the fire will be fully investigated and we will keep people informed."

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Fire safeguards in Grenfell were temporarily removed during refurbishment

NEWS 14/06/17 BY LUKE BARRATT

Safeguards intended to prevent the spread of fire from floor to floor were temporarily removed from Grenfell Tower during a refurbishment, according to documents from the planning application.

Sharelines

Fire safeguards in Grenfell Tower were removed



Safeguards intended to prevent the spread of fire from floor to floor were temporarily removed from Grenfell Tower during a refurbishment, according to documents from the planning application.

A fire tore through the 24-storey Kensington tower block in the early hours of this morning, spreading quickly between floors. The cause of the fire and the cause of the spread are not yet known.

The 2016 refurbishment, which took place after the most recent fire risk assessment on the tower, included the installation of a new heating system in the tower. This required the replacement of the pipes in the floors.

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To install the new pipes, the 'fire stopping' – systems used to seal openings and joints to prevent the spread of fire – had to be partially removed. The intention, according to a sustainability and energy statement authored by engineers from Max Fordham, was to replace the fire stopping once the new pipes had been installed.

Max Fordham did not respond to enquiries about the safeguards put in place to ensure that fire stopping was replaced properly.

According to information released by Kensington and Chelsea Council under the Freedom of Information Act, the most recent fire risk assessment on the tower was in December 2015, before this work took place.

The heating system in the tower uses pipework in the floor underneath every flat, and according to the sustainability and energy statement, engineers needed to replace all pipes to update the heating system, meaning that fire stopping was removed from every floor in the building.

These plans were approved by the council in 2014, when officers noted that the new heating system would "provide a significant improvement to the sustainability of the building".

Rydon, the construction company which carried out the refurbishment, has issued the following statement: "We are shocked to hear of the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower and our immediate thoughts are with those that have been affected by the incident, their families, relatives and friends.

"Rydon completed a refurbishment of the building in the summer of 2016 for KCTMO [Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation] on behalf of the council, which met all required building control, fire regulation and health and safety standards. We will co-operate with the relevant authorities and emergency services and fully support their enquiries into the causes of this fire at the appropriate time.

"Given the ongoing nature of the incident and the tragic events overnight, it would be inappropriate for us to speculate or comment further at this stage."

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Fire risk assessor for Grenfell Tower revealed

NEWS 27/06/17 7:30 AM BY LUKE BARRATT

The last fire safety consultant to assess Grenfell Tower, who received almost a quarter of a million pounds from Kensington and Chelsea Council, "is confident that its fire risk assessment work was carried out to the highest professional standards".



Sharelines

► Revealed: the fire risk assessor for Grenfell

Carl Stokes, director, sole shareholder and only consultant at C S Stokes and Associates – a fire safety consultancy contracted by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) for the past seven years – spoke to *Inside Housing* about his work on Grenfell Tower, which was destroyed two weeks ago in a fire. At the last estimate, the blaze had claimed 79 lives.

C S Stokes and Associates received £244,318 over seven years from RBKC, starting in November 2010, when Mr Stokes was hired as the fire risk assessor for Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) – which managed Grenfell Tower – and continuing until the most recently recorded financial period.

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Housing associations discover same cladding as Grenfell Tower



Independent expert panel to advise government on fire safety

According to his website, he has been an independent fire risk assessor for seven years, the same length of time for which he has been contracted by RBKC.

He was contracted after the board of KCTMO decided to seek "a more competitive price" for their fire risk assessor. The board ended its contract with Salvus Consulting, which had just carried out a fire risk assessment on Grenfell Tower, rating it "normal".

This assessment was made shortly before a non-fatal fire in Grenfell Tower in April 2010, which did not spread beyond the lift lobby where it started, set off a block-wide fire alarm and activated the smoke extraction system.

Mr Stokes replaced Salvus Consulting, and was described at the time as being available for "the most competitive price" and praised for being "willing to challenge the Fire Brigade... if he considered their requirements to be excessive".

It is not known how often Mr Stokes assessed Grenfell Tower, but *Inside Housing* has seen a copy of his fire risk assessment of the building in 2012.

In that assessment, he noted the absence of either "sandwich panels" on the building or "unusual elements of building construction that were considered to add an additional contribution to the fire risk".

This was four years before composite panels were installed in a refurbishment completed in 2016. The panels failed fire safety tests and have since been linked to the spread of the fire.

Mr Stokes was referred to as "the TMO's fire risk assessor" in an RBKC board meeting in 2013, and has received regular payments since November 2010, amounting to a total of £244,318.

According to information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by *Inside Housing*, the last full fire risk assessment of Grenfell Tower was in 2015, before a refurbishment was complete.

Board papers from November 2016, however, after the works had finished, indicate that there was "close liaison with LFB [London Fire Brigade] and [the] fire risk assessor throughout the duration of the project".

A spokesperson for KCTMO has claimed a full risk assessment was carried out in June 2016, although it has been unable to provide documentation or explain the discrepancy in Kensington and Chelsea records.

Mr Stokes has confirmed to *Inside Housing* that he was the independent fire risk assessor of Grenfell Tower between 2012 and 2016.

Mr Stokes' website gives various qualifications for his work, including "19 years fire safety experience with local fire authority, in enforcement and auditing roles, seven years as an independent fire risk assessor".

Updated on 27.6.17: After this story was published, a spokesperson for C S Stokes and Associates Ltd. passed on the following statement:

"The risk assessments, complete with recommendations, were returned to RBKC TMO. It is important to highlight that the building's refurbishment and structural alterations were overseen and managed by the local authority Building Control Department under the Building Regulation process.

"CS Stokes and Associates Ltd is confident that its fire risk assessment work was carried out to the highest professional standards. Director Carl Stokes has 19 years' fire safety experience with local Fire Authorities, in enforcement and auditing roles and eight years as an independent fire risk assessor and fully stands by the recommendations made in his risk assessments.

"CS Stokes and Associates Ltd would also like to offer its deepest condolences to the victims, their families and all those affected by this tragic incident."

Fire safety



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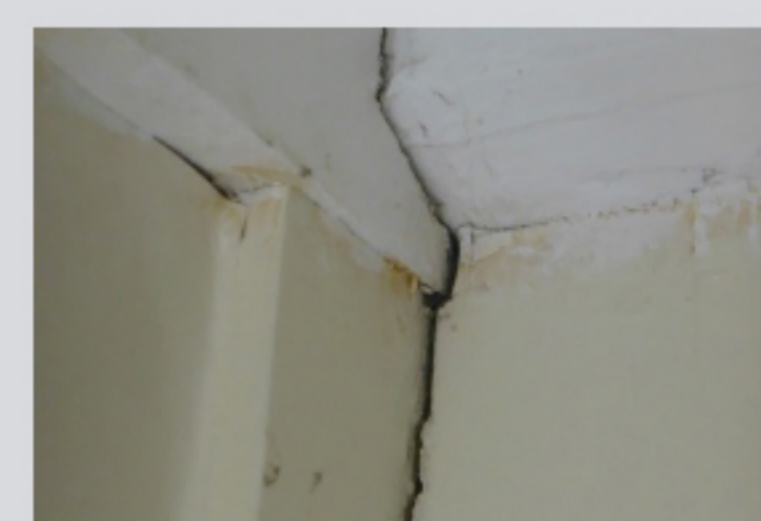
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