

Report from Residents of Tarling West Estate Regarding the Fire at 18 Maddocks House Sunday 5 March

Early on the morning of Sunday 5 March a fire broke out at 18 Maddocks House, the LFB attended, 18 people living in the flat escaped, some with burns. One person with serious burns was taken to ICU. All other residents of Maddocks House were unharmed. On Thursday 9 March we learned that Mizanur Rahman had died of smoke inhalation from the fire. All 18 living in that flat could have died on that night. The dangerous conditions at 18 Maddocks House endangered the lives of everyone living on the estate.

Residents of Tarling West Estate have raised complaints and requests for help individually and through the Residents Association over lack of repairs, poor maintenance, regular leaks, insufficient lighting on the estate and poor response and communication from THH for over a decade.

Residents of Tarling West Estate have raised specific complaints about overcrowding, successive leaks and other problems specifically arising from the unsafe conditions at 18 Maddocks House for the last three years. This is documented. The overcrowding and other problems were acknowledged by the London Fire Brigade, Mears and THH caretakers of the estate. These problems and complaints have been brought to the attention of LBTH staff and Councillors and a brief summary of this history of negligence is evidenced below.

Timeline

November 2021

A leak was first noticed by residents living below 18 Maddocks House

30 November 2021

Operatives from Mears visited Flats 15 and 18 Maddocks House 'traced a leak affecting the kitchen and hallway ceiling'. On a previous visit: 'Mears did make the Landlord aware and advised of what needs to be done and the landlord confirmed that they will arrange for a plumber to fix the leak.'

23 February 2022

Ref: 11486815/1 a call was made to Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) regarding a leak and the owner of 18 Maddocks House renting out to 18 men

5 May 2022

Ref: 177514 a call was made to THH complaining again and requesting an urgent call back from Housing Officer

28 May 2022

Mears plumber and THH Repairs attended flat below and Flat 18 Maddocks House. Requested to return and describe outcome of inspection but this did not happen.

10 June 2022

A complaint was made again because the leak returned.

21 June 2022

Detailed call Fatema Begum. Overcrowding. Leak. Acknowledged.

24 June 2022

Stage 1 Complaint – Ref: 36803345
Response and escalation

Housing Management have made many attempts to contact the resident of No.18 Maddocks House (phone call, email, and letters). As we have had no response from the resident of Maddocks House, a final warning letter was issued on 14 June.

Housing Officer Fatema Begum made an appointment for THH repairs and Mears to visit the flat on 28 June 2022 (we do not know if this was followed through). The same letter reported that the Leaseholder responded on 24 June [same date as this letter] and promised to 'start repairs on Saturday 25 June'. 'Natalia will continue to monitor the above and liaise with you to confirm that all works have been completed by flat 18 and progressed and completed to your satisfaction.'

28 June 2022

Inspection of 18 Maddocks House (and other flats below) by THH Repairs Hubert Rhonden.

19 October 2022

Significant amount of water breaking into other flats from 18 Maddocks House 'through the bathroom, kitchen and wall sockets.' Water flooded into flats two floors below flat 18. Power was out in 14 Maddocks house due to the water reaching electrics. LFB attended the flat and deemed it unsafe and advised that electrics remain switched off for 24-36 hours.

20 October 2022

Urgent request for complaint to be escalated to Stage 2.

18 November 2022

Stage 2 Complaint – Ref : 36803345
Unsatisfactory response and Closure

Evidence of Prior Acknowledgement of Overcrowding at 18 Maddocks House

A letter from Chris Martin Repairs Area Manager dated 24 June 2022

you highlight that you believe that the leaseholder is subletting. I can confirm that an inspection was undertaken last year by environmental health and the property found to be occupied by multiple occupants. This matter is currently under consideration with Danny Harvey and his senior Mr Israel Poppola within the Housing Standards Team.

A letter from Natalia Odhiambo dated 18 July 2022

'I would like to remind you that it is not THH responsibility to repair leaseholders properties due to leaks that they have caused this is solely down to the leaseholder. [...] we went up to the leaseholder of No.18 and noted that they had contractors inside working on the kitchen, we then asked if they had any leaks within the property to which they said no, we asked if we could check all pipe works just to confirm and was allowed to do so, so we checked the bathroom, kitchen & wc we also checked all incoming and outgoing pipe works checked stack pipe work inside and external on the balcony no leaks could be found, eventually we removed the Leaseholder bath and at that time is when we noted the water penetration on the wall. This is what caused the water penetration down below to No.14 affecting the kitchen wall, this was due to insufficient sealant around the bath and the amount of usage it gets per day as there are a few people with the property of No.18 Maddocks'

A letter from Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director – Place Directorate LBTH dated 18 November 2022

Confirms that on 19 October London Fire Brigade visited 18 Maddocks House and noted that flat 18 'was not in a good state with an excessive number of people living in it.'

This letter indicates that:

The THH Alterations and Licensing Officer, Mrs Bobbette Newell-Bent has informed LBTH that she had previously notified Environmental Health who had started an investigation into the unregistered HMO (House in Multiple Occupation). I believe a warrant was issued and an inspection carried out. Mrs Newell-Bent has been liaising with Mr Danny Harvey at Environmental Health, who will be drawing out an action plan moving forward.

Our interest lies with the unregistered sublet and THH have sent the leaseholder a sublet pack. THH will send a follow-up letter / pack as the property remains unregistered.

Conversations with Caretakers. Several residents of Maddocks House from several different flats regularly spoke to the caretakers on the estate about the overcrowding at 18 Maddocks House, the caretakers reported these problems via email to their line managers and the ASB team at THH, they say they sent emails last month (February 2023), and in their monthly fire risk report they noted the overcrowding, smoking on walkways and problems going back month after month after month into 2022.

What Do Residents Want?

That the surviving residents of 18 Maddocks House are provided with secure, safe accommodation and that their needs and demands are met.

Thorough investigation and criminal prosecution of the exploitative Landlord of 18 Maddocks House

Thorough investigation of negligence at THH and the Council, residents have shown irrefutable evidence of a long history of attention and alarm being raised about the overcrowding at 18 Maddocks House and the problems.

Residents request the resignation of Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director LBTH

A response from the local ward councillors Ana Miah and Harun Miah as to what role they played in this and how they responded once the complaint and information about overcrowding was brought to their attention.

Residents want the restructuring of THH, LBTH Housing so that it serves residents not landlords

Residents would like to see an audit trail from the council and THH of all the calls and emails related to this case.

Every step necessary to prevent the criminal exploitation of tenants in local authority housing

Every step necessary to prevent a fire like this ever happening again

We want Housing authorities to listen directly to residents

We want better communication between the officers managing housing, residents and the Residents Association. We want everything to be clear, transparent and every enquiry and complaint to be followed up thoroughly and satisfactorily.

Compensation for stress, financial losses of residents of Maddocks House who suffered for years.

We want the failures of communication and monitoring, between agencies, between departments in Local Authority Housing to stop and every gap between these structures to be closed.

Never Again!!

Staff at THH and LBTH Notified

Mr Danny Harvey LBTH Environmental Health

Hubert Rhoden THH Repairs

Chris Martin Repairs Area Manager THH

Mrs Bobbette Newell-Bent THH Alterations and Licensing Officer

Natalia Odhiambo Repairs Officer THH

Mr Israel Poppola Housing Standards Team LBTH Environmental Health

Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director – Place Directorate LBTH

Tanveer Ahmed THH Housing Officer/Neighbourhoods Officer

Anu Miah Councillor LBTH

Harun Miah Councillor LBTH