

Tenant Management Organisations

This is an extract from the BBC's Grenfell Tower Inquiry podcast No.130 broadcast in late 2020.

First, I want to put the Tenant Management Organisation into context for you, what was its role and had it always been involved in large regeneration projects like Grenfell Tower. Alastair Macintosh (check spelling) is the Chief Executive of the House Quality Network and he helped set up Kensington and Chelsea's TMO just under 20 years ago.

Alastair Macintosh "It was early 1990s at that stage investment in local authority housing was at a record low and stock condition was very poor. The options they faced at that time were one you can transfer the whole the homes to a housing association. The upside of that were you avoided limits on public expenditure the downside was you lost local political control. If you stayed with the local authority the risk was you had to tender the housing out to the likes of the Capita's the Serco's which is unpalatable and almost at the last minute the government came up with this option of tenant management.

Now why was Kensington and Chelsea the only council to go for a borough wide tenant management organisation. I think there was three reasons.

- First of all, the councillors, although they were Conservative, did want to distance themselves from Westminster and the homes for votes scandal whereby that council was pushing out the homeless. So, I reckon the council had a bit of a noblesse oblige they wanted to make things better for the residents.
- Secondly, in Martin Kingsford you had a director of housing that was a long-term enthusiast for resident involvement, he'd previously been at Lambeth, this was his thing this was his driving force.
- But crucially you had some exceptional local resident community leaders like Doris Bessant (check spelling) who was I think at that stage down at Elgin Avenue and Winston Evans (check spelling) who was the chief transport and general workers representative I think for the buses in that area and I'm told the father of Yaz who was the singer that came up with the 'Only Way is Up'.

So that was the start of it, it was a genuine resident movement I was proud to be involved at that time and obviously I'm heartbroken about what's happened since."

So how did this change over time?

"I suspect that when Grant Shapps, who was the housing minister for a period of time, withdrew the inspection regime from housing and scrapped it. I think perhaps the focus dimmed almost everywhere and then of course there was the drive to save money through austerity that's been such a feature of so many of the witness statements we had at the inquiry."

I mean looking at these Tenant Management Organisations and similar organisations across the country was it common that all of them moved from being simply management organisations to doing much bigger regeneration asset management type projects?

"It's not unusual, essentially what happened is the organisations were set up too bring the properties up to what was called a 'decent home standard'. So, over a period of time they finished their prime task. So, we've seen some of these organisations go into new home building, and we've

certainly seen some become housing associations but those that have survived have tended to broaden their remit.”

And when you broaden your remit like that do these organisations tend to have the skills in place to take on those new projects?

“I mean you know the answer to that based on the evidence. You cannot watch those witness statements in the box day after day and form the view that this was a well-functioning organisation with access to the correct expert advice. We can’t shy away from that but unless there is a sea change in that amount of money we’re prepared to pay for public services this is going to happen again.

The expertise has been stripped out of local authorities for many years. This has been an argument folk have been having since the late 1980s and I do not believe that the quality of advice that was given to Kensington was materially different to the quality of advice that others get.”