



Cause of Grange estate blaze may never be known

By Janet Maitland

The cause of the fire that engulfed the roof of Willow House on the Grange Estate in November may never be known for certain.

As we reported last month, 60 people were lucky to escape with their lives when flames took hold of the block off Oak Lane, N2, in the middle of the night. Quick-thinking neighbours managed to raise the alarm and residents fled, but many were left with just the night clothes they fled in.

Damage prevents investigations

Commenting on the possible cause, a spokesperson for the Fire Brigade told *The Archer*: "It's most probable that the fire started due to an electri-

whole building.

We were informed that there are no fire alarms in communal spaces such as stairwells and corridors as these are not legally required. We also asked if all the flats had smoke alarms and were told that these are only required by Barnet Homes tenants. For the flats sold on a long term lease it is the leaseholder's choice, unless they are subletting.

Fire doors at Grange Estate

The most recent fire risk assessment of the block was carried out on 15 May 2017.



The flames take hold in Willow House. Photo Ximenita Pachon

cal episode in the loft space, not necessarily a fault as they can't determine this, but due to the extensive damage, further investigations are unlikely to take place."

A post fire safety audit has also not been carried out by the Brigade for the same reason, but a fire safety officer who attended at the time of the fire did not note any deficiencies.

Smoke alarms

We understand that while the fire involved an area of common roof space, it was divided by partition walls at regular intervals. These breaks performed as they should and there was 'no unusual fire spread'.

Given that residents managed to escape Willow House before the Brigade arrived only because they were alerted to the fire by neighbours banging on their doors, we asked Barnet Homes about fire safety in the

These are undertaken every three years in Willow House and in other blocks with the same risk rating.

In July 2018, following the Grenfell fire investigations, the government advised the owners of buildings with Manse Masterdor or Masterdor Ltd fire doors to review their fire risk assessment and consider how quickly these doors should be replaced as they do not meet the 30-minute fire resistance standard.

Fire doors are not required at Willow House as the front entrances open onto a balcony area. However, there are 167 Masterdor Ltd fire doors fitted on blocks in the rest of the estate. Barnet Homes informed us that they are "committed to replacing them" and are "working with the contractor who supplied them to seek a suitable solution for these doors".



No barriers: Ricardo Stewart helps vulnerable young people into employment. Photo Damian Frank

A deep connection with the soul of the community

By Toby Chapman

A grant of £15,000 has been awarded to Community Souls, the local social enterprise company founded in 2011 by Ricardo Stewart to tackle the issues he encountered while working with people living in the most deprived estates in Barnet.

Ricardo, who grew up on the Grange Estate in East Finchley, is a trained youth practitioner and life coach with over ten years' experience of working with some of London's most vulnerable young people.

Turning nothing into something

He got the idea for Community Souls after watching many of his friends going in and out of prison.

He said: "My peers, people that looked like me, people that lived in my area, none of them were interested in pursuing the 'normal' path. What I learned from the people I grew up with was that hustler ambition, of turning nothing into something. I just decided to turn that into creativity."

Ricardo set up the socially-conscious commercial cleaning division of Community Souls in 2014. Each employee is paid the London Living Wage. They also receive one-to-one mentoring and help with their personal and professional development.

"It's about more than just providing financial support," he said. "We're a community interest company and we want to deliver social value to our

community. It's not about restoring the soul of the community, it's about connecting with it."

So far, 19 people have been employed, 15 of whom have gone on to further employment or education. The new £15,000 grant will be used to reach and

employ more people in 2019. It was awarded by UnLtd, a charity that funds social entrepreneurs.

Ricardo's work with the charity Art Against Knives was recognised in 2018 with a London Youth Practitioner of the Year Award.



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