

**Witness statement of: Michele McHugh**

**No. of statement: 1**

**Exhibits: 1**

**Date of statement: 8 February 2019**

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHELE MCHUGH**

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**I Michele McHugh say as follows:**

1. My full name is Michele McHugh
2. I make this statement following a request to London Fire Brigade ("LFB") from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry dated 5 June 2018.

#### **Preliminaries**

3. I was taken on by the London Fire Brigade (LFB) on 21/09/2007 as the Library Manager as I was a Chartered Librarian and they need somebody with my experience. Prior to working for the LFB I had worked for 20 years or more as a technical librarian, library manager and technical editor working in and managing libraries in the construction industry; employed by companies such as Davies Langdon Everest (Quantity Surveyors), John Laing PLC, Laing O'Rourke and Anshen & Allen (architects).
4. I was made redundant from the role of LFB Library Manager in March 2013 and redeployed into the Westminster Fire Safety team on 01/04/2013. As I had been redeployed I had to go through a recruitment process for the role of Fire Safety Inspecting Officer and was successful in my application, receiving a letter dated 14/10/2013 confirming my appointment with effect from 11/11/2013.
5. My fire safety training consisted of:

- 01/04/2013: When I joined the Westminster fire safety team on 01/04/2013 I was told by the team leader to ask the experienced inspecting officers if I could shadow them on their audits and when that was not possible I was told to read the various fire safety literature documents available e.g. Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) published guidance on fire safety in various premises, Approved Document B and LFB fire safety guidance documents and policies. I was not given a mentor and a training schedule was not drawn up.
- Most of the experienced inspecting officers were very willing to take me with them and after the audit showed me how to complete the online audit form on the mobile device used to record audits. The officers I shadowed took me to a variety of premises which included houses converted to flats, purpose built flats of varying heights (including high-rise), hotels, hostels and sheltered housing, restaurants and fast food outlets, educational premises and student halls or residence, theatres, shops, and offices. As I had not yet been given a development folder I kept my own word document log of visits.
- During this initial period I was also asked by one of the Watch Manager B's in the team to help record the receipt of the Building Consultation jobs (D jobs) that arrived in the office. To do this involved using Farynor, the fire safety database where all of the audits, building consultation requests received from Approved Inspectors and other fire safety jobs are recorded. This gave me a good understanding of how the database works and the information it contains.
- During this period I was also shown how to carry out simple D jobs by experienced inspecting officers. This enhanced my knowledge of reading plans.
- 29/08/2013 LFB attended High Rise TDE training
- 16/09/2013: from week commencing 16/09/2013 my new team leader decided I was competent enough to carry out simple audits and allocated me 5 simple audits. Although I was the lead officer on these audits I was accompanied by experienced officers who also assisted me in completing the online audit form if I had any difficulties.
- 11/11/2013 attended a 6 week LFB course delivered by John Bradbury and various persons with relevant fire safety experience.

- I have attended various training courses which have been followed by written assessments to achieve:
    - i. SFJ Awards Level 3 Certificate In Fire Safety (Fire Auditors) (QCF)
    - ii. IQ Level 4 Diploma in Fire Safety (Fire Inspectors) (QCF) 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016
6. The courses I attended covered many fire safety subjects including fire safety provisions specific to a high rise residential premises e.g. smoke ventilation, dry/wet risers, fire-fighting lifts and the lobby protection of escape routes. The courses also covered the various types of detection and early warning systems and evacuation strategies appropriate to high rise premises.
7. The knowledge gained from the training courses was enhanced and reinforced by continuing personal development (CPD), discussions with colleagues and familiarising myself with key documents such as:
- Fire Safety, Approved Document B, Buildings other than dwelling houses
  - BS 5839 – Fire detection and alarm systems for buildings
  - BS 9999:2017 – Fire safety in the design, management and use of buildings, Code of practice
  - BS 9991:2015 – Fire safety in the design, management and use of residential buildings, Code of practice
  - Housing – Fire Safety: Guidance on fire safety provisions for certain types of existing housing. Published by LACORs
  - Fire Safety in purpose-built blocks of flats . Published by The Local Government Association
8. In addition to the courses I have attended I had to keep internal development LOGs on audits I carried out until I had passed all of the relevant exams and achieved competency.
9. On 05/10/2015, as part of a restructuring of the South West area fire safety teams I was transferred from the Westminster Fire Safety Team into the Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea Fire Safety Team.

### **Grenfell Tower**

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10. 08/09/2016 a programmed fire safety inspection of Grenfell Tower was entered onto the fire safety database Farynor with a begin date of 08/09/2016.
11. 13/09/2016 (approximately) my team leader asked me to carry out an audit of the premises. I have worked this out from an old Excel spreadsheet I keep of jobs I have completed. I am not sure of the exact date.
12. 30/09/2016 emailed Janice Wray (JW), Health, Safety and Facilities Manager, Kensington & Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation (KCTMO) informing that I had to carry out audits on Barandon Walk and Grenfell Tower and asking for the fire risk assessment (FRA) for both buildings and advice on how to gain access to the building.
13. On 05/10/2016 JW replied to my email, attaching the FRA and advising me that there was a Lancaster West estate office but that it would be closed for refurbishment until 24/10/2016 and that if I wanted access before that date I should contact her and she would arrange for somebody to meet me on site.
14. On 06/10/2016 I replied to her email stating that I would wait until the office re-opened before carrying out my inspection.
15. I entered the inspection date of 27/10/2016 and details in my Outlook calendar.
16. Before the inspection I read through FRA, noted that there were no significant findings (i.e. fire safety deficiencies) or action plan to remedy any fire safety deficiencies. The FRA appeared to be suitable and sufficient i.e. it considered all risks covered by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. At this time I was unaware that fire risk assessments carried out on KCTMO properties usually came in two parts i.e. the action plan and significant findings were contained in a separate document and that it was normal practice for the TMO manager to only send the fire risk assessment. The action plan and significant findings had to be requested specifically. Because I only became aware of this some time after the audit and my follow up actions had been completed, the significant findings and action plan were not considered during this audit process.
17. On 26/10/2016 the Grenfell Tower job was recorded on Farynor as being allocated to my workload by Team Leader Rebecca Burton (RB).

18. When I went on the inspection I took with me a paper notebook and my brigade phone. I exhibit the notebook I used for the Grenfell Tower audit as MM/1. We had been issued with a mobile device which was extremely heavy and impractical to use when auditing a residential premises where there was nowhere to sit and write notes. I think my notes were fuller as I was using pen and paper rather than the mobile device we had at that time. From conversations with my colleagues I believe this was common practice amongst many inspecting officers at that time, especially those not using a car.
19. On 27/10/2016 I travelled to Grenfell by public transport to meet with my colleague, Ms Siam Kee Yeoh (SKY), who was to shadow my inspection as she was on development as an inspecting officer. On arrival at the Lancaster West Estate's office we were taken to Grenfell Tower by the maintenance manager Mr Seamus Dunlea who gave us access to the building. I noted the cladding, which was attractive, and would probably have commented on it but did not record any notes as we are not required to inspect it under the current legislation.
20. Mr Dunlea offered the following information which I noted down in my notebook MM/1: the building was originally constructed in the 1960s with 6 flats per floor but recently refurbished and new flats slotted in from 3<sup>rd</sup> floor down to 1<sup>st</sup>; the building was fitted with automatic open vents (AOVs) for smoke extraction on each floor; there were dry risers on each floor and the two lifts were fire-fighting lifts i.e. could be controlled by firefighters in a fire. He did not accompany us on the inspection. We entered the building at ground floor level at approximately 9:45 and travelled to the top floor (23<sup>rd</sup>).
21. I inspected 100% of the common parts of the building from top down as this is my usual approach. I also audited all floors rather than sampled, as I am very thorough. When inspect a high-rise building I am looking for the following:
- Automatic opening vents (AOVs ) and any controls
  - Dry/wet risers in place with adequate access doors and no obvious damage
  - Any damage to wall or ceiling coverings that would aid the spread of flame
  - Any detection or early warning in the common parts (the lobby areas). I would not usually expect to see a fire alarm system in the common parts of a purpose built block of flats constructed from concrete as the recommended evacuation strategy would normally be "defend in place/stay put" based on the premise that each flat should be a



60 minute compart. However there are sometimes detector heads fitted to activate the AOVs

- What detection and early warning is inside flats as, although we have no jurisdiction in single private dwellings, we can strongly recommend to the Responsible Person the installation of appropriate detection in all flats. I would acquire this information by sampling some flats i.e. knocking at front doors and asking residents what detection and early warning they have in place and who fitted it.
- An adequate escape route with no obstructions, trip hazards or combustible items
- That there are no obstructions, trip hazards or combustible items stored in the common parts
- Any glazing on the escape route is fire resistant i.e. either marked with the relevant British Standard or at least Georgian wired
- Any breaches in compartmentation or fire separation e.g. excessive gaps around fire doors or holes in the ceilings or floors of service riser cupboards. This could allow fire and smoke to spread.
- Fire door sets are fitted to each flat (at least 30 minute) with self-closers and whether or not cold smoke seals and intumescent strips (strips and seals) are fitted. This can generally only be established by sampling some flats i.e. knocking on doors and asking the resident for permission to check their door. Even if permission is given it is not always possible to be 100% certain that a door is a fire door as any identifying marks or labelling are usually not visible. I would make an assessment based on the thickness (which would be at least 44mm for a 30 minute door) of the door and the number of hinges (there would normally be three) and whether or not strips and seals have been fitted.
- That fire doors protecting the escape staircase are fitted with self closers, closing quickly enough, fit fully into their frames when closed and are not obstructed in any way
- That service cupboard doors are fire doors, signed "Fire Door Keep Locked Shut" fit snugly into their frames and are and locked shut
- That doors to bin chute rooms are fire doors, signed "Fire Door Keep Shut" fitted with self closers and fit fully into their frame
- Adequate emergency evacuation lighting and that it is in working order. Necessary to assist persons evacuating.

- Good fire brigade access
- There were no sprinklers – I would not have expected them to be in place

22. At audit I noted and recorded in my notebook MM/1 ( ) the following, the majority of which were fire safety deficiencies:

- 23<sup>rd</sup> floor- buggy outside flat 203; wooden chair outside flat 206 (*combustible materials and a potential trip hazard/obstruction*)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> floor – shoes outside flat 194 (*potential trip hazard/obstruction*)
- 21<sup>st</sup> floor – scooter outside flat 183 (*potential trip hazard/obstruction*)
- 19<sup>th</sup> floor – the self-closer on the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not functioning correctly and the door was not closing fully into the frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 18<sup>th</sup> floor – various items outside flat 151 (*combustible materials and potential trip hazard*)
- 18<sup>th</sup> floor - front door of flat 153 checked and found not fitted with self-closer, the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 17<sup>th</sup> floor - the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 16<sup>th</sup> floor – artificial flowers had been placed behind the dry riser pipe (*combustible materials*)
- 15<sup>th</sup> floor – panels outside flat 126; shoes and rubbish dumped on the floor of the bin room (*combustible materials and potential trip hazard/obstructions*)
- 15<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> staircase – emergency evacuation lighting did not appear to be working
- 14<sup>th</sup> floor – 3 buggies and a hobby horse outside flats 115 and 116 (possibly belonging to flat 114), (*combustible materials and a potential trip hazard/obstruction*);
- 14<sup>th</sup> floor - the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 13<sup>th</sup> floor - the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 12<sup>th</sup> floor – emergency escape lighting on the staircase was charging but the bulb was missing – this was reported to the maintenance manager after the inspection

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- 11<sup>th</sup> floor – the door to flat 86 was not the same as the majority of doors and was not fitted with a self closer (*potential breach in compartmentation*) – I cannot remember how I know this. It is possible that I spoke to the resident but I have not made a note of this.
- 10<sup>th</sup> floor – the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 8<sup>th</sup> floor – the panels protecting the service ducts were broken (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 7<sup>th</sup> floor – plants on the dry riser outlet; collapsed boxes outside flat 44 (*combustible materials and a potential trip hazard/obstruction*). I spoke to a fair haired white woman and a man with dark hair who lived there and I told them to remove the cardboard boxes and explained the reason why; they complied. I checked the front door and found it was not fitted with a self-closer (*potential breach in compartmentation*). The residents informed us that a smoke detector was fitted in the hall and a heat detector was fitted in the kitchen. They did not state who had fitted them – assumed KCTMO. They also told us of issues with people parking cars on the emergency vehicle hatching which they stated had been reported to the KCTMO; the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*). I intended to follow up the issue of the vehicles parking on the emergency vehicle hatching with a station notification but I cannot find any evidence that I did this. I have a vague recollection of making a phone call and being told that this had already been reported.
- 5<sup>th</sup> floor – rubbish, chest of drawers and umbrella outside flat 24 (*combustible materials and potential obstruction*). I have noted that the residents stated that they had not been informed of the evacuation strategy.
- 5<sup>th</sup> floor – the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 4<sup>th</sup> floor – plastic plant outside flat 11; black stick-on skirting delaminating (*combustible materials*)
- 4<sup>th</sup> floor – the lobby door protecting the escape staircase was not closing fully into its frame (*breach in compartmentation*)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> floor – large rug, plant, clothes-horse with laundry drying on it blocking the dry riser plus real Christmas tree outside flat 8; large pile of post outside flat 7; shopping



trolley outside flat 10; mobility scooter outside flat 9, being charged via a lead through the letter box (*combustible material and obstruction/trip hazard*) The resident of flat 9, Mrs Mariko Toyoshima-Lewis (a young disabled woman with 3 children under the age of 8), explained that although the flat was supposed to be designed to provide accommodation for a disabled resident she could not get her mobility scooter into the flat and without it she would be completely housebound. Her flat was fitted with detection in every room. This was already fitted when she moved in – assumed KCTMO.

- The single means of escape staircase ended at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and from this point residents would either have to use the lift or exit via a controlled secure exit door leading to a balcony/mezzanine floor and a staircase down to the ground floor and final exit
- No Fire Action Notices informing residents of the action they should take in the event of a fire were displayed anywhere in the building
- No Do Not Use Lift in the Event of Fire signs were displayed by the lifts
- Outside it was noted that the bin room door was not locked – this was not included in my Notice of Deficiencies – I cannot remember why. It is possible that I discussed this with the maintenance manager, Mr Dunlea, as I have also recorded that the escape hatch from the basement was not working. I did not inspect the basement so I must have been told this by Mr Dunlea.

23. The inspection took approximately 1 and a half hours and was completed at 11:15 a.m. when we went to find Mr Dunlea again to gain access to the second block we were inspecting, Barandon Walk. On our way to the next building I mentioned to Mr Dunlea that the flat front doors we had inspected were not fitted with self-closing devices. He offered the following information which I partially recorded in my notes **MM/1**( ) and on my audit form - he stated that KCTMO had fitted new doors to the majority of the flats apart from those occupied by leaseholders and these had originally had self-closers but these had been removed as they were too strong and were damaging the door frames. From the way this was said I assumed that the KCTMO had removed the self-closers.

24. I entered my notes onto my mobile device on 4/11/2016. Before an audit is finally submitted we follow a process called the Enforcement Management Model (EMM), this enables us to ensure we are serving the correct level of notice. On this occasion the EMM score was 2

amber and 4 green which led to a Notice of Deficiencies ("NOD") rather than an Enforcement Notice. As there had been a previous Notice on this premises the new NOD could have been increased to Enforcement but as LFB policy at the time was to work with KCTMO to help them improve their fire safety provisions in their premises it was agreed with my team leader (RB) to issue a NOD.

25. The time given to address the fire safety deficiencies was 26 weeks. The form was submitted to my team leader for vetting (checking for accuracy) on 4/11/2016. This part of the process is carried out before any letter can be sent out.
26. I later checked the electronic file and it showed the date of NOD and the covering letter was 17/11/2016. The date given to complete the actions by was 18/05/2017. As a NOD was issued and not an Enforcement Notice I did not return to carry out a follow up inspection - this was LFB practice at the time.

**Statement of truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and be published on the Inquiry's web site

(witness signature)

*McHugh*

Michele McHugh

Dated: 8/2/2019