

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: DEWIS, BEN

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: FIRE SAFETY TEAM LEADER

This statement (consisting of 5 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: B DEWIS

Date: 21/09/2020

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

I joined the London Fire Brigade in November 2013, as a non-operational member of staff. I don't have any operational background. I joined as a Fire Safety Inspecting Officer, and that training took 12-18 months. On 4th July 2017, I became the Fire Safety Team Leader for Kensington and Chelsea on a temporary basis. I am presently on the same team, but I have become a permanent member of staff. I cover Kensington, Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham. I am based at Paddington Fire Station and am the line manager for inspecting officers, whose job it is to inspect premises in order to enforce the fire safety regulatory reform fire safety order. I ensure that they have a work load, which I vet, and I liaise with the local authority in order to maintain a good relationship between them, the LAS, the police and the LFB. I report to Group Manager Martin FREEMAN, he is the South West Area Fire Safety Manager.

My team is made up of six inspectors; my deputy team leader is Watch Manager Robert (Bob) MCTEAGUE, there is also Watch Manager Cameron HUSSEIN, and fire safety inspecting officers Siamkee YEOH, Orlando BRANCACCIO, Christopher HARDMAN, and Michelle MCHUGH. I also have two operational people on my team, but they have joined the Fire Safety Team, so they do the same as the non-operational members of staff. Before I joined the LFB, I was a fire extinguisher engineer.

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I attend monthly meetings and meet people from the local authority. We discuss any issues they have and we help by sending inspecting officers to their premises. This is also part of our usual program workload which involves us inspecting premises on the Borough for fire safety purposes. My main contact for fire safety at Kensington and Chelsea was Janice WRAY from the KCTMO. I am unsure of what is happening with the KCTMO at the moment, but she is still my contact to date. At the monthly meetings, I have also met with Graham COOPER who was brought in as an outside consultant, to work with the RBKC, but he was originally working with Hammersmith and Fulham before the fire. After the fire, Kensington and Chelsea asked to use his services as well. He works for both sides, which means that he is a good contact to have; he is a Fire Safety Manager for RBKC.

During these meetings, my role is to talk about fire safety and they may update me on certain programmes of work, such as fire door or glazing replacement, and fire risk assessments, but that is very generic to all of the blocks.

Before the fire, I didn't have much to do with Janice WRAY because I wasn't the team leader, I was an inspecting officer, and I would have had a program of work given to me which may have involved my inspecting a KCTMO block as part of that program and therefore needing to speak to Janice in relation to the risk assessment form. There was never an issue with her sending me these forms. The only time that I had been to Grenfell Tower was when I was on development in 2014 and I was shadowing Mathew RAMSEY who was my mentor and he was inspecting Grenfell Tower. The number of times that a building was inspected would depend on a few factors. It would go into our risk database, and then, usually depending on the direction of the authority, it would come under an inspection regime, so that once every two, three, or four years, inspections would take place, or it could depend on whether there had been prior enforcement there.

It is impossible to give an accurate figure now of how often Grenfell Tower came up under the inspection regime.

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In relation to the three finger blocks at the base of the tower, I inspected Hurstway Walk in around 2015, but I didn't need to raise any issues at that time. I wouldn't have had sight of the fire risk assessment until after the inspection, which would have discussed the fire doors, means of escape, the final exits, and whether the means of escape was sterile. I remember commenting on the extended travel distance, but because it was sterile, meaning there were no combustible items there, it was deemed to be 'broadly compliant'. Carl STOKES had completed the Fire Risk Assessments.

I understand that historically, residents have made complaints in respect of fire safety issues at Grenfell Tower, which is probably the same for numerous tower blocks. If a complaint was made, we would attend the site and make an assessment, or if the situation required a different method of dealing with the complaint, we would deal accordingly. Issues were raised, and as far as I am aware they were dealt with appropriately.

Each day, we would have a designated team contact officer, so complaints would be put through to that person

The process is that if a complaint of a serious nature comes through to us, an inspecting officer is sent to the site within four hours. Sometimes this could lead to senior officers being called out to prohibit the use of the building, but that is just an example of what could be done. This would all be recorded, from the very initial email, to all discussions being uploaded on to our internal portal, the e-fire safety portal, and the subsequent record trail showing the fire safety officer being called out, because they would complete their own report. If a prohibition notice, also known as Article 31, was issued, that would be shown on Farynor which is a computer system we use that logs all the jobs.

The only complaints I remember before the fire for Grenfell Tower were in relation to fire fighter access, because there was a lot of building work going on. I remember a resident there called Eddie DAFFARN

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was quite vocal in relation to this. He sent a few emails suggesting that the building work would restrict emergency access in the event of a fire. My response was to forward those concerns to the local station manager which at the time was Daniel HALISSEY, who I think may have retired now. I requested that he ask the crew to carry out a familiarisation visit, in which they would take a fire engine down to ensure that they could get into the building safely to fight a fire. There will be records of any concerns coming in, and me then forwarding them on to Dan HALISSEY, and there will also be an email trail between Dan and Janice WRAY that I am copied into. This was just to confirm that the crews were satisfied that there was a tactical plan to fight any fire. That was roughly in 2014/2015. Other complaints regarded an issue in relation to gas pipes, which was raised to myself and I forwarded the concern to my then team leader, Rebecca BURTON. She rightly stated that it was the responsibility of the gas board. I advised the resident, whose name I can't remember, of this. The complaint referred to there being gas pipes situated in the escape route.

Everything I have had in relation to Grenfell Tower, I have passed to our Grenfell Tower Review Team.

I was on annual leave in June 2017 when the fire occurred at Grenfell Tower. I am aware that Kensington and Chelsea subsequently requested that the fire risk assessments (FRAs) for all of the high rise buildings across the borough be reviewed. FRAs are the responsibility of the 'Responsible Person' (RP) of a building and they are duty-bound to carry them out. The inspecting officers may look at the FRAs as part of their inspection of the premises, I wouldn't do this in my role as a team leader. The inspecting officers wouldn't necessarily look at the FRA if they deemed everything as being correct, and they aren't always kept on the premises.

The idea of the FRA is that the risk of a fire occurring in a premises is assessed, and that then leads to a management plan in relation to which findings need to be rectified. If nothing is found on the day of the inspection, we know that potentially the fire risk assessment has been complied with, because we haven't found any issues.

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My deputy on the Fire Safety Team, Robert MCTEAGUE, knows Andrew (Archie) CHANDLER of fire consultants FCS-Live. I understand that Archie used to work for the fire brigade and had quite a senior position operationally. Bob MCTEAGUE has been a constant presence with me as he is the deputy team leader, this includes the monthly meetings and the inspections of the finger blocks at the base of Grenfell Tower. It was Bob's job to do an inspection of all three blocks, and he had sight of the FRAs. He had the day to day dealings from an inspection point of view, whereas my job was to oversee him. If anything was to come out politically, then I may step in, as the enforcement levels may need my input.

We did have concerns about those 3 blocks, particularly in respect to the ventilation. It's an area outside my expertise, however, hence why we consulted with our fire engineering team, to obtain specialist guidance. We questioned whether smoke could ventilate adequately in the event of a fire. I don't know if it was before FCS became involved, but certainly when Bob and I went down there, we had concerns, and we stated that we needed the ventilation and the FRAs to be reviewed. We were also concerned about whether the fire doors had self-closures, and we took all of our concerns to the KCTMO. I know that they had had all their FRAs reviewed, and I understand that FCS had completed an FRA that Bob had had sight of, which he reviewed as part of his normal process as an inspector. Bob agreed with FCS, as their risk assessment matched what we had noted ourselves. We were happy to support that, and Bob gave them some good feedback in the audit form to say that the fire risk assessment was sufficient and under Article 9 of the fire regulations, he would have said that it is compliant but that it is now the duty of the KCTMO to manage the findings and put them into process. Bob and I did discuss our thoughts about the smoke ventilation at the three finger blocks with both the KCTMO and the LFB Fire Engineering Team. John SUTHERLAND has been my point of contact in relation to the latter.

When we inspected the blocks, as far as I understand, they weren't up to full capacity as many people had been evacuated, but there were people still living there. Maybe about twenty five percent of residents were there at the time. The KCTMO had employed a fire warden team to patrol the area 24 hours a day because of the outstanding issues with the building. This was to enable a smooth evacuation in the event that there was a fire.

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My concern about the ventilation was that if there was a fire, a large volume of smoke would come out of the flat and fill up the common area. Although there is a 'Stay Put' policy, there is nothing to prevent someone from leaving their premises, and they would then enter a smoke-filled, internal area. We were concerned that the automatic opening vents (AOV's) would not remove the smoke as quickly as it should, and that we would still have a smoke filled condition inside that area of the building. We contacted the fire engineers and they took that technical side on. We just want the ventilation to be sorted to a point so that it can be deemed safe, and we then we will be happy with the block. That is where we're at with it right now.

I think that Bob and I first attended the finger blocks on August 15th 2017, and Janice met us on site with other members of the KCTMO and RBKC. We told them then that the ventilation was not suitable and that they needed to review it. Their subsequent review included smoke modelling which would show whether smoke could leave the building adequately in the event of a fire. It was then that FCS-Live and Turner and Townsend became involved. The KCTMO were receptive to our concerns and agreed to do whatever was needed to solve the situation. I can't remember who was with Janice when we met up, but their names will be on the emails that passed between us at the time. I received an email from them confirming everything that we had spoken about, especially as Bob was involved through him doing the official inspection at the time. He would therefore have requested the FRAs, maintenance records, and the personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEPS) for anyone within the building that is disabled or hard of hearing.

It was around this time that we saw Archie CHANDLER from FCS-Live on site, when he was carrying out the FRA's and Bob and I were on site with Janice WRAY. His FRA was quite damning in relation to the ventilation system not working, and stated that a consequence would be that a lot of smoke would collect in the common parts if a fire occurred. I can't remember if we just happened to be on site at the same time as FCS-Live, or whether it was pure chance, but there have been other meetings we have attended along with them, Turner & Townsend, the KCTMO and the RBKC.

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Bob and I were invited along to a meeting at one point where we believed that there was going to be an outcome, but we felt that we had been asked to attend to act as referees between FCS-Live and Turner & Townsend. We told the KCTMO that we were unhappy that we had been bombarded with figures and facts related to fire engineering when we weren't the experts, and we told them that they needed to invite the fire engineers to their meetings if they wanted to discuss such issues. That meeting turned into an argument between the two companies, which I think I can provide emails on. We told the KCTMO and RBKC that we weren't worried about which company was used, so long as the outcome meant that the smoke ventilated sufficiently and the residents were safe.

We agreed with the assessment of FCS-Live; that the three finger blocks needed further ventilation. I remember that Turner and Townsend also felt that the buildings required improved ventilation.

At the meetings, I remember FCS-Live stating that the opening of the AOV needed to be expanded or removed entirely, or that the atria should be completely lifted up, to allow the release of smoke.

Bob and I were satisfied that those options would be a way of remedying that failure, but we do understand that there are a number of ways to remedy failures and we weren't concerned about how it was done, we just wanted the issue sorted out.

I don't know what happened specifically after that, but Turner & Townsend became the new fire risk assessment company and were looking at the ventilation. They subsequently came up with another solution, within which they claimed that the ventilation would become sufficient if they increased the size of the AOV. They did some smoke modelling which I passed on to John SUTHERLAND, the LFB Fire Engineer. This came back as not being satisfactory as they had modelled it on a much smaller fire

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than that that we would have used. They had modelled it on a 1kw fire and we had asked for a 2.5KW. A kilowatt is equivalent to a single bar fire. **I'm not sure at which point that process is at the moment.**

Smoke modelling is a bit like the FRA in that it is their duty to carry it out, and we as the enforcing authority then review the measures taken.

In relation to the work started on the three finger blocks, I am aware that there is a program to replace all fire doors within RBKC to 30 or 60 minute fire doors, complete with the door frame, intumescent strips, smoke seals and a self-closing device; that has been mentioned in my monthly meeting. I know that they have started fitting smoke curtains over the windows because one of my concerns was that the once external area had become internal because of the atria, which means that the glazing was not of a fire resisting standard as the windows could open, and the fire and smoke would therefore escape out into that now internal area. This was highlighted by FCS-Live. Their suggestion was to remove the atria, and return it to its original state. We would have supported that, as it appeared to be a valid way to make the building safe.

Turner and Townsend carried out the smoke modelling and said that they could increase the size of the AOV, because the RBKC wanted to keep the atria as they were concerned about the public image of the building, and people getting wet when they were outside their flat.

In response to this, Turner and Townsend suggested smoke curtains on the windows that face inwards. The smoke curtain has the appearance of a metal frame around the window, and is linked to something inside the flat that will detect smoke in the case of a flat fire. The smoke curtain then descends, keeping the fire within, and making the windows fire resistant. John SUTHERLAND and his team of engineers took that on, and they raised concerns in a meeting this year with Turner & Townsend, the Head of Housing with RBKC and the KCTMO in relation to the necessity for a maintenance schedule, and how

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the option of smoke curtains would work with the fire strategy and the smoke modelling, as we can't support this as a solution if the smoke modelling shows that it would fail in the event of a fire.

I know that they have already started fitting the smoke curtains and I know that the fire engineers are not happy with how they have gone about things.

My only involvement with FCS-Live, and Turner & Townsend has been through my liaison with the KCTMO. I have just been reiterating to Janice and the rest of the KCTMO that they need to progress what is necessary to make the building safe.

I have had one further interaction with Archie CHANDLER by way of email in which he expresses his concerns and I replied with the fact that I agree with his frustrations and just want the issues solved. I am frustrated that it has taken so long to get sorted. I think residents have slowly been moving back, but I don't know how many have returned. An Article 31 was never considered for those three blocks as they did not meet the conditions. The condition that took it away from Article 31 is whether a fire is likely. We are not able to say that a fire is likely within the common area because it is a sterile area, and within the flats, they have a fire door, albeit that residents sometimes remove the self- closures and, in relation to this, I do sympathise with the KCTMO, but I feel that they should run a program where they check that the residents don't change parts of the building that are put in place for their safety.

I am continuing to attend monthly meetings with Janice WRAY and Graham COOPER, and Bob attends as my deputy or on his own if I'm not available. This is still an ongoing situation which has not yet come to a satisfactory conclusion.

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