

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: MCTAGUE, ROBERT

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

Occupation: RETIRED FSIO

This statement (consisting of 6 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: R MCTAGUE

Date: 30/01/2020

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

This statement has been given in relation to the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14th June 2017.

On Thursday 30th January 2020 I met with PC Richard GREENGRASS and DC Meenal DAVE at the London Fire Brigade headquarters based in Union Street, SE1.

I was in the Military for ten (10) years before I joined the London Fire and Rescue Service in 1989. I moved around a few stations and in the early 2000s, I joined the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) following training in Texas. I then joined a newly formed department called the Trainer Responder Team in around March 2006 based at Southwark where we delivered all the required specialist rescue training to the fire brigade initially at sixteen (16) strategically based stations, anything from high line rescue, extrication, trench rescue to building collapse. It was any incident, it did not have to be fire. I was the co-author of the National Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) policy and I also trained the police nationally regarding movement around collapsed structures. I worked at USAR for around seven (7) years. Our training was then outsourced to BABCOCKS and in around October 2013, I moved into a Fire Safety department as a Fire Safety Inspecting Officer (FSIO). I was an operational fire fighter, Station Officer - Watch Manager B, based at Kensington and subsequently we moved to Paddington. All my operational deployments stopped upon joining Fire Safety but in order to keep some of my skills current, I used to volunteer to go out with Fire Investigation (FI). I did request that I be allowed to keep my skills and knowledge set current, for example the Breathing Apparatus (BA) training etc. but it was refused by Phil RICHARDS and this would have been authorised by Andy ROE and Dave O'NEIL. I retired on 31st September 2018.

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Originally, the Fire Safety Team consisted of around forty-seven (47) people, including seven (7) Station Officers - Watch Manager B but by the time I joined it was me and around five (5) others. I was Deputy Team Leader and my Line Manager was a non-operational officer, Rebecca BURTON. At around the time of the fire, Rebecca was moving team and the new Team Leader was Ben DEWIS. Though he was my Line Manager, I helped him with liaison with the police and other authorities, due to my operational knowledge.

The training required to be a Fire Safety Investigation Officer (FSIO) is a Level 4 Diploma, through the NFA (National Fire Association) and aligned to the Institute of Fire Engineers. It is a modular course with around 23 modules. Some of the modules are more technical than others but to be honest, the training is not fantastic, I did OK because of my operational knowledge and other courses I have done. It can be anything from inspecting really simple premises like a room the size of a kiosk to more complex buildings. I did the training at Union Street HQ, most of the training was internal but there were some external trainers, to a degree. The training used to be in house for five (5) weeks covering breathing apparatus, ladder work and fire behaviour. This was aligned to a national qualification from the institute of fire fighters. The training was then outsourced to BABCOCK where new qualifications were developed by them covering twenty three (23) units averaging a week per unit. This was an obvious issue as the fire service were getting trained and given qualifications by people that had never performed the role so when questions of experience were raised, they had no answers. I didn't feel the training they gave was significant enough for those getting the qualifications to be able to perform duties to the best possible ability and knowledge. Parts of the courses were skipped or cancelled last minute but that part of the syllabus would still be signed off as completed.

The FSIO role is a combination of reactive and proactive actions. I specialised in hospitals, when I left, I had twenty-seven (27) hospitals, throughout the North-West, in my remit. I used to attend architects' meetings and give a response to what they were designing; how they were doing it; did it sit within the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO); had they stepped outside of it; why had they done that; was there an engineered solution; what had they done; what system were they using within the British Standards under the Health and Technical Memorandum, I would have a look at all of that.

I was supposed to do around seven (7) inspections a month and I don't think I ever reached that number. This was simply because there really was no-one else and I had asked for support.

At times someone would come in and say they have a difficult job and would ask for my advice. I would have a quick Q&A (question and answer) on it - what have you done; how have you done it; who have

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you informed; time scales; have you given a Notice of any type; do you think that is going to happen - all the stuff you would do. If they were unsure, I would offer support and go on a visit with them.

If we had an ongoing fire or post fire report, my team would go and have a look at it. They don't happen all the time, you might get three (3) or four (4) at a time and then nothing for a year or so, so it is good to rotate the Fire Safety Team to go and look at them. If there were any refurbishments, any changes to layout, anything out of the ordinary, anything unusual, I would get my team to go out and look at it. We did not do much in North Kensington as it was split between the Westminster and Hammersmith teams. When you record something on a visit, it goes onto a data set called Farynor, this system is accessible by all FSIO's. If I found something in the premises with which I was unhappy, I would contact the local Station Commander and say this is what I found, you need to get your Crews to go and do a section 11D or now a section 7(2)D visit for a full operational understanding of what the risk is; where it is; what we can do; what facilities are there, anything and everything. They record that on the site and either the person who did it, or someone capable, would record that on a PC which then feeds into the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT), so when the fire engine turns up on a call, the information is there.

I have visited Grenfell Tower many times and have attended fires in there and the finger blocks next to it but I couldn't say when exactly. I have visited the building several times for the 7(2)D visits.

From memory, I did visit the building with Ben DEWIS after the refurbishment. North Kensington Station had received some complaints around parking and they asked us to take a look at a few things. It was not about the building but things like access under the finger blocks and Grenfell Walk and the plug in and some other things the residents from the finger blocks had raised. The man who has been writing up the website for the building and the complaining did come and have a conversation with us about the building, it is going to sound awful but it sort of went in through one ear and out of the other, because you are always getting approached - it was the usual 'you Fire Brigade blah, blah, blah'. If I had a concern, it was about the riser system in the finger blocks as a part of the pipework was missing and that had been reported and a lot of work was happening around that. Some of the conversation might have been about the work done on Grenfell Tower, but the truth is, I can't remember. All of my visits to Grenfell would be recorded on Farynor and should still be recoverable showing the comments made by myself regarding that building.

I have no specific knowledge of the Automatic Operating Ventilation (AOV) system installed in Grenfell Tower, during the refurbishment.

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There are several types of systems, it could be a simple system, clearing the protected route, stairs only or it could be intumescent strips, grills on the doors and into the lobby area. In my thirty (30) years, I have come across many AOVs and have known them to fail regularly. The reasons for failure can depend on many things including the height of the building to where the fire is located.

Operational knowledge of the ventilation system should be covered in the 7(2)D visits by the crews - Red, White, Green and Blue and some of the Stations nearby; within the Fire Brigade on the Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) for this building and it should be on the MDT. So you should have an appreciation of where you are going, where the plug in points are, the hydrants are, where the riser systems are, whether it is wet or dry, all of that is part of the 7(2)D. This information should also be recorded on the Farynor system.

There are multiple high rise buildings in the area and it is difficult to remember all of them and the layouts. Any decent Governor or anyone who has that knowledge to share should make sure that everyone walks through the building - going through the fire safety systems and security considerations.

For any system with a testing regime within it, the person who is named on the Risk Assessment, legally and the person who is named for the maintenance and for the testing has to be there. So when the crews turn up, if there is any testing initially, for the Fire Service operational reasons, the person or persons with absolute, unquestionable knowledge of that building, are there and can go through how everything works. Crews would attend in rotation, so that all crews are aware of the workings of the building.

A Risk Assessment should be conducted every two (2) years maximum but usually it would be reviewed every year - unless there is fundamental changes to the layout to the building or the processes or there has been an incident. You would review it, you may not change anything but you review and date it.

There are many different ways of doing Risk Assessments and I do a lot of Quality Assurance of Risk assessments in my current position. They should cover standards and best practices, they should give alternatives and the Actions should show how it should be and what it is.

I know both Janice WRAY, from the Council and Carl STOKES, the Fire Risk Assessor. Janice is easy to talk to but the issue was that I would ask her for a Risk Assessment on a particular building and she would send the basic Risk Assessment. Though I have asked her multiple times and in multiple ways, to be sent the Actions, along with the basic Risk Assessment, she never would. We would not know what was identified in the Actions, if they had been done, what the timescales were, if it was a priority. My team and I would always have to chase her up for them. I have been to many meetings with Janice, there

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were a lot of fires at Trelick Towers. She would keep a lot of things to herself. She would never send everything, we would always have to ask for something before she would send it.

I have never met Mr STOKES but once you have got through the first four hundred (400) pages of how great he is, he doesn't tell you anything, that is my opinion. When you read his assessments, it is almost like he doesn't want to take responsibility for what he is finding. There are pages of nothing and you have to really go through it to find what he is identifying as an issue. Even then, he would not state the Standards he was applying, the alternatives available or any thinking around risk/decisions made. He should be using the approved documents when conducting the risk within buildings.

We have the television on all the time in the house and on the night of the fire, my wife alerted me to the news of the fire. My initial thought was fear. I was Red Watch for years and I recognised the faces of some of the firefighters on the news clips. I have been on calls where the whole building is on fire and you are told there is someone inside, so you have to go in. It is not good.

At around three (3) o'clock, possibly later I got a phone call from Rebecca BURTON asking me if I was watching the fire and asking me to go in early. I went to Paddington early and I was asked to gather any information from Farynor or from anywhere else, for that estate and to lock it away in Rebecca's office to keep it safe for when it was needed. I contacted Michelle McHUGH, who had done the Risk Assessment for Grenfell Tower and Siamkee YEOH, who had shadowed her on that visit. I asked them both for any documents they had, like the note books, photographs, anything at all, it was all put into big brown envelopes and left in the office. I told Rebecca they were there. We had an email that day telling us to not let anyone near the Grenfell details on Farynor so I deliberately didn't look at it. Both Michelle and Siamkee were concerned that entries they had put on there may be inaccurate or wrong. I managed to calm them down and reassure both, simply reaffirming the need to gather the information.

I was not deployed to Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire. I remained at Paddington and was helping out any way I could, as the firefighters arrived from Grenfell, I was talking to them, making the tea and trying to keep them in their groups. I was glad I did not go there.

I am immensely proud of my thirty (30) years of service. It saddens me we are where we are but being out of the service for just over a year now and through the role that I am now doing, I can see a whole range of things that could be done and should be done differently. People should be encouraged to seek specialities, through training and to be given the recognition and qualifications to do that role. The Fire Brigade are not doing that and that is where we are failing. Fire safety is an area where the LFB need to improve, the levels of knowledge are not there for incident commanders when arriving at scene.

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