

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF THOMAS JOSEPH MICHAEL "JOE" DELANEY**

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#### **Background**

1. I make this statement in relation to Phase One of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. I started living at [REDACTED] Brandon Walk in March 2010. I live alone apart from my two dogs, Luna and Scooby.
2. I have worked for various local authorities in the past [REDACTED]. My work has involved working in social services, housing, IT, procurement, risk management, and insurance areas in various capacities.
3. I have evidence in relation to a number of matters prior to the fire which may be relevant to Phase Two of the Inquiry and which I will deal with in a later statement. I also intend to describe the aftermath of the fire and something of its impact upon me and others in my statement for Phase Two. In this statement I intend to provide evidence about events on the night of the fire.

#### **The night of the fire**

4. On the evening of the fire I was aware something was wrong at around just before 1.00 am when I saw blue lights on Grenfell Road. I didn't check what was happening, I would often see ambulances or fire engines out there attending to issues in the Tower and it wasn't bothering me.
5. At around 1.05 am or 1.10 am, a neighbour, Lucas, knocked at my door and said Grenfell Tower was on fire. I put on a tracksuit and walked from my block out onto Grenfell Walk where I saw the fire around the 4<sup>th</sup> floor on the East side of the property at what I now know to be Flat 16. It had started on one side of the Tower, in one area, but while I was out there I saw it spreading towards the centre of the building at the same level.
6. There were lots of people outside, commotion and smoke. Someone went to the rubbish chute at Testerton Walk, ripped open one of the rubbish bags that were surrounding it, and started to throw stuff at the windows on the South side of the tower to wake people up. I don't know who first had the idea but it seemed a good idea so many of us present, myself included, copied it. I cut the palms of my hands up in the process as a result of throwing glass bottles/jars at windows which had broken when thrown previously. We threw things up on the south side. I threw quite a lot, felt like for at least 20 - 25 minutes but I can't say for certain how long for. People were coming to the windows. It became clear that many in the Tower were unable to exit their properties because the smoke was so thick and visibility was so poor. I know this because people inside the Tower were saying they couldn't get out

because of smoke and they couldn't see. We were saying the Tower was on fire, you lot need to get out and advising them to cover their faces to avoid smoke inhalation. People outside were telling them to wait as firemen were going inside; I felt afterwards maybe I caused more harm than good in waking people, maybe it was better for them to die in their sleep. I don't recall the specifics of which people I saw in the tower. The highest we managed to throw things up at the building was about the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> floor.

7. By 1:30am it was clear to me that people were definitely going to die but I didn't want to say that whilst outside for fear of causing panic or upsetting anyone. By this time, the fire had spread from the north corner of the east side where flat 16 was to the centre of the Tower and then up the centre of the East side (facing the sports centre) to the very top. It was at this time, that I took my first video TJD/1 MOV\_2052.mp4. This is timed at 01.30am.
8. The spread of the fire went all the way up the middle shaft of the east side, then towards the north and south edges of that side to form a crude "T" shape on the east side, it then spread all the way down the northern half of the east side from the top whilst also beginning to spread to the north and south sides of the Tower from around the top.
9. At around 1.31 am I ran into the Barandon Walk block as I was concerned that the ferocity of the fire would mean that it would spread to my part of the estate and I wanted to ensure that my neighbour, Tomassina Hessel, and her child were ready to leave if necessary. I didn't realise it at the time, but I inadvertently recorded my second video of the night whilst making my way back inside, I exhibit this as TJD/2, video MOV\_2053.mp4 timed at 01.31am.
10. I knocked at her door and woke her. I told her what was happening and we looked at the Tower from the window in her flat. It was here that I took my third and fourth videos TJD/3 MOV\_2054.mp4 (01.34am) and TJD/4 MOV\_2055.mp4 (01.35am). I told my neighbour to prepare a bag; she was clearly sceptical when I said it was likely that we would be evacuated so rather than argue I just said that it would still be better for her son if she spent the night at my flat as the Tower wasn't visible from there. That way, she would still be ready to leave if necessary.
11. Whilst I was filming, I thought that the "centre" of the east side where the fire spread was where the only staircase in the block was located, although I now know that it isn't quite in that location. I said to Tomassina while we were watching the fire that I thought the fire was going up the emergency staircase and I could hear people in the tower saying "help" and "save us", which is clearly audible on the recording.
12. I called 999 at 01:37am as I left Tomassina's flat and I was on hold for 30 seconds before being connected to an operator. I said to the operator we need all three emergency services and I used the phrase "major incident" as I figured if I used their lingo would elicit the right response and I knew this was the appropriate thing to say from my emergency planning work at both [REDACTED] Council and at [REDACTED], who hosted major events such as Winter Wonderland at Hyde Park. I attach an audio recording of that call as Exhibit TJD/5.

13. By the time I called 999 I had not seen police or ambulances, just London Fire Brigade. I wanted the police, fire and ambulance to all attend as it was clear to me that all were necessary. I knew with absolute certainty this was deadly serious so I wanted an appropriate emergency response. I also deliberately recorded issues the fire crew had with access and responding to the fire. I wanted to ensure that this was properly documented so those responsible for the architectural and planning decisions made when the Tower had been "regenerated" would be held responsible; myself and other residents had raised numerous and repeated concerns about emergency access to the building prior to the Kensington Aldridge Academy and Leisure Centre being built.
14. The first photo I took that night is time-stamped at 01.48 am DSC\_2059.JPG and I exhibit this as TJD/6. This was taken from Grenfell Walk as I went back outside to see how things were shortly after completing my 999 call. With this photograph as with some of the others I took that night I have used a website called Jeffrey's Metadata Viewer to show the time the image was taken as well as the location from which the image was taken, sometimes with co-ordinates and sometimes on a map. I have produced a document using that website to show the metadata from each of the photographs I took that night and I exhibit this as TJD/31.
15. By this time, the cladding was raining down from the Tower as it burned; you could hear a constant "popping" noise and with each pop more of the cladding would explode from the side of the Tower and rain down. There used to be a curtain around the perimeter of the Tower to stop things that were dropped hitting people but this had been removed as part of the regeneration works despite the objections of numerous residents at the time. After the redesign, there was only a small covering over the main entrance. This was making the fire crew's job extremely difficult as they were having trouble accessing the Tower because of the cladding raining down and the fact that they did not appear to have the means to open the entry doors to the Tower itself. The noise corresponded with flaming parts of the building popping off the building. It sounded like packaging air bubbles popping or popcorn in a microwave but louder. Between the Academy and the sports centre side of the tower when I heard the loud popping noise I saw flaming debris falling, as if someone was throwing burning coals but they fell apart. I could see the sides of the tower which were "popping" off. I have never seen concrete explode like that so it must have been the cladding. I now know this for certain as the stuff was also found for miles around the area in the following days and weeks. I couldn't hear conversations with people standing quite close to me due to the popping noise and the other noise in the area.
16. The fire crew were also having problems because of the fact that the hoses and other equipment they had was not able to reach the fire to extinguish it. I took some more photos and videos whilst on Grenfell Walk to highlight the issues experienced by the fire crew before I went back inside. These are Exhibit TJD/7 is DSC\_2060.JPG, TJD/8 is DSC\_2061.JPG, TJD/9 is DSC\_2062.JPG, as well as videos TJD/10 MOV\_2056.mp4, TJD/11 MOV\_2057.mp4, and TJD/12 MOV\_2058.mp4.
17. I think another problem the fire engines may have had is not being able to get past the bollards which had been installed at the top of Grenfell Road on the paved area which runs between the Kensington Aldridge Academy and Kensington Sports Centre and ends at the junction of Grenfell Road where the road turns left towards

the Tower. I believe these are telescopic retractable bollards (position marked on map, Exhibit TJD/13 marked with a red X) and I think they probably could not get them down as they had no access to the control mechanism for them. The surrounding grassed area is quite hilly and I remember seeing fire engines on this but it seemed difficult for the fire engines to safely navigate, as if they are not designed for such terrain.

18. I could see downstairs beneath me whilst on Grenfell Walk and from my balcony that fire engines were not as close as I thought they should be, and neither were the firemen. Fire debris seemed to prevent the firefighters getting closer.
19. It appeared to me that whilst some fire-fighting personnel had accessed the building earlier, the bulk of the fire crew were actually able to gain access to the Tower at 01:58am. It was clear that they were desperate to get inside and rescue people as you can see from the photos I took. TJD/14 DSC\_2077.JPG and TJD/15 DSC\_2078.JPG show the firefighters I had seen having trouble getting into the tower just after they gained entry. They rushed in via the one access point available and some of them didn't even have protective hats on at the time; it was practically a melee. It looked to me like they had attempted to buzz numerous properties in the Tower from the intercom at the main entrance to get in. I don't know how they got in. You can see on my photos when the firefighters reached the mezzanine level and that the main entrance door on the ground floor had clearly been propped open, presumably as the fire crew didn't want to risk it closing and locking again.
20. Someone later told me they had been given a resident's key fob to gain access but I can't recall who told me this or when. I am aware that the entry system used at the main entrance of Grenfell Tower, as well as throughout the Estate, should record each entry fob's unique ID number as well as the date and time that it is used and for which door it has been used. I know this because many years ago I had seen the system in use in Trellick Tower and seen a computer terminal in the office behind reception which showed this information and which I saw in action. I have also seen a similar system in operation [REDACTED] where I used to live.
21. There could be a number of explanations for the access issues into the tower. I think that either the firefighters' 'fire key' to Grenfell Tower didn't open the main door - I understand a fire key is a largish key used by emergency services to enter buildings. Or the firefighters didn't have a fire key. Given there were six fire engines and lots of firemen I thought they should have the fire key. I know the door at the bottom of Grenfell Tower had been replaced due to the regeneration. I can't believe one of the police officers or firemen wouldn't have a fire key so I assume it didn't work on the building. From what I recall I can't remember there being a fire key hole in that front door.
22. At different times throughout the night I saw fire crews using what looked like riot shields to act as umbrellas, they all piled in, some without breathing equipment or hard hats. I mainly took pictures at this point because it was difficult to get clear video of the cladding and debris raining down.



23. I returned to my flat at 02:00am where I also video recorded and photographed the fire engines I could see on Grenfell Road from my balcony. It was utter chaos downstairs; Grenfell Road was too narrow to allow the fire engines access and residents were forced to go down there to move their parked cars, doing 3 point turns. There was a chain of fire engines all backed up on Grenfell Road and people were forced to drive their cars onto the paved areas to get them out of the way of the fire engines. I went back to Grenfell Walk and took Photos TJD/16 DSC\_2065.JPG, TJD/17 DSC\_2066.JPG, and TJD/18 DSC\_2067.JPG which show the scene on Grenfell Road as seen from Grenfell Walk. Photos TJD/19 DSC\_2084.JPG, TJD/20 DSC\_2085.JPG, TJD/21 DSC\_2086.JPG, and TJD/22 DSC\_2087.JPG as well as video TJD/23 MOV\_2083.mp4 show the scene on Grenfell Road as seen from the balcony of my flat on Barandon Walk.
24. I could see downstairs beneath me whilst on Grenfell Walk and from my balcony that fire engines that were not as close as I thought they should be, and neither were the firemen. Fire debris continued to prevent the firefighters getting closer and the lack of access points prevented the fire engines from getting any closer.
25. A policeman entered Brandon Walk from the Grenfell Tower end at roughly 02:30am. He came running in, I can't remember his exact ethnicity but I do recall that he was not Caucasian. He had a high visibility jacket on but not a constable's helmet; maybe a flat cap or no hat. He was saying everyone should get out. Barandon Walk has three levels internally; I was just outside my front door [REDACTED] and he was on the "ground" floor which is the level the Grenfell Walk entrance is on. He was about to come up the stairs to my level of the block, presumably to alert other flats, but I felt it was more important that he let the [REDACTED] block know so I said "don't worry mate, you go through and tell them in the [REDACTED] section, I'll do these flats." I banged on the doors on my level and the level above [REDACTED] to alert them to get out. I think I banged on [REDACTED] and to all of [REDACTED]. Basically everyone on the top floor, [REDACTED] those flats and I got responses from most. I kicked on their doors as loudly as I could. Most answered the door quickly. I was concerned about one of the [REDACTED] flats near Tomassina's. The occupant is a nurse with a teenager and young kids so I was particularly concerned for them.
26. We were heading to the rear end of Barandon Walk as this was the way we were instructed to evacuate by the policeman I had seen earlier. Barandon Walk is divided into three sections; flats 301-339 are in the section closest to Grenfell Walk, the next section has flats 401-439, and the final section has flats 501-522. Although they are all joined, the 500 section could not be accessed from the rest of the block internally but there was an internal connection between the 300s part and the 400s part. However, the 300 and 400 parts are separated internally by doors which can only be opened with an entry fob. As a general rule, the fobs of residents of one part cannot open the door to the other part, so residents from the 300s cannot access the 400 section and vice-versa.
27. There are rubbish chutes in the middle and a staircase that leads out to the grassed area at the rear between Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk (Green X on map) but we were all told to evacuate via the main entrance/exit point for the 400 section of the block (Blue X on map). However, residents from the 300s could not open the internal door leading to the 400 block as their fobs didn't work the door and it was still locked,

despite the emergency situation. It was therefore fortunate that my key fobs did operate the internal doors; they had been reprogrammed when I suffered a broken leg shortly after I moved onto the Estate as I found it easier to use the door at that end of block whilst on crutches and the access rights had never been revoked. In case it is relevant when my key fobs needed to be authorised to open doors in the 400 section of Barandon Walk I didn't need to take them to any office, I was simply contacted when the process had been completed at their end.

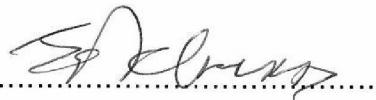
28. I was therefore able to open the door on the "ground" floor to let residents through and wedged the door open with welcome mats I took from flats nearby whilst I gave Tomassina Hessel my fob and she went upstairs to do the same thing to the other doors on the "first" floor.
29. I left the block with my two dogs accompanied by various residents. When we got outside, we all sat on the grassed area just outside the 400 entrance (Blue cross on map). At the time, Scooby was 13 years old whilst Luna was just under five months and had only been in my possession since early April. Scooby is extremely well trained with lots of experience of noisy and crowded situations so he was extremely calm and obedient once we were outside. I was more concerned about Luna as she was not used to anything like this and also lacked the training and discipline to obey instructions and remain calm. I therefore kept Luna on a lead as I was concerned she would panic and bolt. At one point, I gave the lead to Tomassina to hold but she dropped the lead and Luna immediately bolted. She ran south towards Treadgold Street but thankfully she did not cross any roads; instead ran up Whitchurch Road seeming to follow the perimeter of Barandon Walk.
30. By this time, (roughly 02:50am) police lines had been established at various points in the surrounding area including one on Whitchurch Road near to the entrance to Baseline Studios. Police there were shouting at me to stop and attempted to physically block me, but I just tackled my way through to get past them but said sorry as I did so.
31. When I reached the bend on Whitchurch Road near the entrance to the 500 section of Barandon Walk, I stopped as I did not know which direction Luna had gone. There were numerous people in this area and they must have seen Luna run by and guessed that I was chasing her as they informed me that she had gone through the gate leading to the grassed area between Barandon Walk and Testerton Walk (Black X on map).
32. I stopped when I reached the gate and looked onto the grass to see if I could spot Luna. As I did so, I saw people jump or fall from the tower. I definitely remember two people falling, but it might have been three or four in total. One person hit the side of the building; one came tumbling down the side of the building. I vividly recall being transfixed by it.
33. By the time I reached that gate, it was 40 to 50 mins since I'd last seen the tower. It was crazy over how much of the tower the fire had spread. It was now entirely covering all parts of the east side where it began and also all of the south side that I could see from my vantage point as well as the top of the west side. I was able to see people drop because the fire light was so bright and they were silhouetted against

the tower fire as they fell. They fell from the upper floors from the top 5 floors or so. The first one was definitely on the western half of the south side of the tower; I don't know if others were in quick succession or if I was stunned, I can't give a timescale. I remember one of those I saw hit the building as they fell. It was clear some appendage of theirs had hit the building and this caused a tail spin in their fall. Thankfully, I did not see any of them hit the ground; my view of the lower section of the Tower and the ground was obscured by Grenfell Walk. I remain affected to this day by what I did see and so I am somewhat grateful that I did not witness anything more.

34. I then walked into the area where I found Luna standing near the entrance leading into Barandon Walk (Green X on map). The dog's lead mechanism had broken off during her run but I wrapped the cord around my wrist and led her back to where everyone was sitting on Grenfell Road. I didn't tell others what I had seen but I was still impacted by it. I received an SMS from a friend at 03:05am. He is a builder and had been working at night on a project; he was returning home on the A40 Westway flyover and had seen the Tower as he passed the area. His first message asked if I was OK; I replied that I was and he then sent me a message offering to pick me up and let me stay at his home [REDACTED] W9. As I knew he would not be able to get anywhere near the Tower, I made arrangements to meet him by Holland Park tube station. After what I had seen, I was keen to get away from the Tower as quickly as possible; Tomassina was also keen to get her son away so I took them both with me and made my way towards Holland Park Avenue. I took a series of photographs as we were leaving at different locations. These are Exhibits TJD/24 DSC\_2088 to TJD/30 DSC\_2094. The last two images are of fire engines parked on Sirdar Road W11 4EH.
35. The roads were chaos, as busy as Carnival even though it was gone 03:00am. Police had attempted to block various roads in the wider area surrounding the Tower; whilst this may have prevented some access to the Tower it seemed to be causing more problems as vehicles that wished to leave the area were also prevented from doing so. There were cars all over the place; we walked past St Clements Church and headed towards Holland Park Station. I put the radio on my phone to hear news reports about the fire as we walked.
36. When we reached Holland Park Station and were waiting to be collected, I checked news web sites and also Facebook to see what I could find out. I also wrote a post at the time which said the KCTMO had "cheaped out" on their regeneration and because of that I watched people die before my eyes and that prison was too good for them.
37. I have attached as Exhibits TJD/32 – TJD/46 further images and videos I took that night in case they are helpful when read in conjunction with the metadata in TJD/31.
38. I am willing to attend the inquiry to give evidence in person.

**Statement of truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

Dated.....