

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: WOODHOUSE, ELIZABETH

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

Occupation: EMERGENCY MEDICAL DISPATCHER

This statement (consisting of 4 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: E WOODHOUSE

Date: 22/05/2018

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

This statement is in relation to the Grenfell Tower Fire that occurred on WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2017.

I am based at [REDACTED] LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE (LAS). I have been an Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) for four (4) years. I have worked in this role mainly, but have taken part in other roles including helping with other areas at WATERLOO ROAD. I take calls from members of the public. The call comes in to 999, the member of public is then asked what service they want. As soon as the call comes through to us, we answer as soon as we hear the initial beep. We triage the calls, using a System called Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS). There are thirty-seven (37) protocols including breathing problems, animal bites, psychiatric, etc. The system is a yes, no question and answer process on the computer as well as some more detailed questions. At the end of the call, there is an evaluation and a priority level is generated. There is C1 immediate, C2, C3, C4 and 111 no ambulance needed.

The training that I have had has included learning on a card set initially. The training is five (5) to six (6) weeks, based at SOUTHWARK ROAD. The training includes classroom based learning. The first few days were First Aid then more classroom based learning on the LAS and their roles. I started on the card set then on to the computer. There is also training on how to take calls and deal with them. When we receive a call, the computer links to the Dispatch Team based on area of call. They are able to see the calls and can send out crews relevant to the call.

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Call handlers are all on one (1) floor, there are around fifty (50) computers. The Call Taking Controller (CTC) supervisors are sat at the front of the room and available for us to speak with if we need further advice. The dispatch crews and management are on another floor. In my role, I do not have contact with the LAS crews unless they call into the call handlers directly.

The Standard Operating Procedure, once a Major Incident is declared moves to the Special Operations Centre (SOC) Room at WATERLOO ROAD. The call handlers still receive the calls from the public. There is an updated list of who will work in the SOC room daily. When there is an overflow of calls, dependent on the amount of call handlers available, whether a major incident or just a large amount of calls, the calls would be placed in a queue. The calls are only answered when a Call Handler is available. An operator will answer the call and may send the call to another Ambulance Service outside of LONDON however, the call would still need to come through to one of the LAS Call Handlers. I am able to answer a call from anywhere in LONDON.

Before the night of 14th JUNE 2017, I was not aware of GRENFELL TOWER or the area of LONDON. I started my night shift at 1900 on TUESDAY to finish at 0700 on WEDNESDAY JUNE 14th 2017. I was working at WATERLOO ROAD. I was with A WATCH, which is usually the same team. We work shifts that include three (3) out of four (4) weeks we are with our own relief. We do four (4) days on as earlies, three (3) days off and four (4) nights on then seven (7) days off. Then it is three (3) nights with four (4) off, then three (3) days on. There is also a relief week where we could work differing types of shifts. The relief week is generally with a different relief.

At around 0100hrs on WEDNESDAY 14th JUNE 2017, I was in the Call Handlers room at WATERLOO ROAD. I was aware that one of my colleagues, Fraser LANG had checked his phone and had seen on his mobile phone that there was a fire in LONDON. There are Televisions in the rest room and I could see that the fire was large and was getting worse and worse. There were a few of us in the rest room watching the TV; we were shocked by the state of the Tower. The whole Tower was in flames and was getting worse until it looked like a fireball. I was shocked and thought that there would not be many survivors as it was night-time and it was a tower block.

The Call Handlers had not been given any advice as to what to say to callers from the incident as it had been assumed the calls would be to the LONDON FIRE BRIGADE rather than to the LAS.

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We had not taken many calls that night. At around 0230, I received a call. I answered the call to someone who was screaming at me that they were trapped. They sounded panicked. I was able to get the address; I recall it being Flat 186 on a high floor in GRENFELL TOWER. The person said that there were five (5) people in the flat. There is a burns card procedure to follow but I did not ask the caller any of the listed questions as I felt that they were not relevant. I said that help was coming. The person was yelling at me that they needed help. I kept trying to reassure them that they would be rescued. I did not know what else to say. I told them that the Emergency Services were there. There was a Television in the SOC room, I could see on the news that Emergency Services were at the scene.

The person I spoke to was female. I could hear a male shouting in the background saying that we are dying. I put them on hold. I spoke to Laura OWEN on the CTC desk. She was helping in a supervisory role. I asked Laura what the hell I should tell the person on the call. She came over to my desk and said not to ask the questions on the card. It felt like the call was quite a while but it was probably only a couple of minutes. When I came back to the phone, the call had dropped out and the caller was gone.

The whole time that I had been on the phone to the caller, I had been able to watch the news footage on the TV in the SOC room. It had not seemed real that I could see the fire and was speaking to someone inside. I tried to stay detached from thinking about it.

After the call had gone, I spoke with someone but I do not recall who this was. The protocol is normally to call the caller back three times if the line goes dead. This is to check whether the call was an error or they no longer need an ambulance. I felt guilty that I did not call them back.

Kirsty TRAYNOR had also taken a call from GRENFELL TOWER. I was not aware of the content of her call but I could see that she was upset. We spoke about the calls after the incident.

Within the SOC room, we carried on taking calls from across LONDON. The footage was still playing on the TV. I do not remember any of the other calls I took that night. I worked until 0700hrs on WEDNESDAY 14th JUNE. I did not take any other calls from inside the Tower. I was not aware of any other calls coming from inside the Tower being received by the LAS Call Handlers.

I did not take any notes or make a log. The call is logged on the computer system.

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I did not have a debrief after the incident. I worked the following night and I was upset so I was moved and did not work as a Call Handler that night. I did not work at the weekend as I was given the weekend off. A few weeks later I was called by the Trauma Liaison for an assessment, this was followed up a month later.

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