

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: BROWN, ROB

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

Occupation: FIRE FIGHTER

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: R BROWN

Date: 29/01/2018

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

This statement relates to my involvement on the night of the Grenfell Tower on the 13th-14th June 2017.

I am a Crew Commander for Surrey Fire & Rescue based in the Control Room and have worked for them for the past 13 years and 9 months. I initially trained as a Control Room Operator before developing on to a temporary Crew Commander and finally becoming substantive in March 2017.

On the completion of training as a Control Room Operator we are awarded with an NVQ after 2 years. The training itself involved the basics of call handling, learning about crews, understanding addresses, types of incidents, radio work and the management of resources. The course is an initial 6-week basic training followed by a 2-year probationary period in which we would have to complete a work book evidencing competency. Following the 6 weeks, the new recruit works within the Control Room but is constantly monitored by an experienced staff member, either another Crew Commander or Watch Commander.

The training that we undertook for the initial training involved role plays of different scenarios and calls, on the job training and the understanding of the different calls we would take and we would learn whether to be reactive or proactive to the caller. For example, if the caller gave us all of the required information we would need to know, such as the location and type as well as any other information, we would only need to be reactive and ask some fine tuning questions. However, if the caller was nervous or panicking we may have to probe further and ask more questions to make sure we get all that we require; a more proactive approach.

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The essence of call handling is to acquire 3 pieces of information; the address, the incident type and the phone number. Once we have all 3 we can start building on the specifics for the crews that are required. Ultimately we need to get as much information as possible to aid the crews in their attendance. We also try and ascertain where exactly the fire is within a property so the crews have a good overall picture before they attend.

The call taker will then assign the nearest appliance to the address, depending on operational availability. Training also encompasses the management of resources and how best to relieve crews at major incidents. Part of the role of a Control Room Operator is dealing with Fire Survival Guidance. Essentially if a person is trapped, Fire Survival Guidance becomes applicable and we need to give the best possible advice available in order to keep them safe until crews arrive. The advice often includes opening windows, blocking doors and finding ways of alerting people who are on the ground that they are trapped inside. It is very much led by what the caller says as they are the eyes and ears of the situation and the advice can very much be dependent on what they say. We are led by information given by/obtained from the caller.

Within the Fire Survival Guidance comes the 'stay put' policy. This is based upon the building structure. Sometimes it can be that the caller is safer by staying inside a property than getting out and the point of compartmentation is to facilitate this. Compartmentation is a design in which flats are designed to be single compartments that can detain fires and stop the spread to other parts of the building. Essentially it is about maximising the time that someone is safe within a building.

In the event of large scale incidents, we have a procedure in place for the overflow of calls to be diverted to a different Brigade. This happens nationally amongst Brigades and is known as a 'buddy' system. For example, our buddy is Merseyside. When there is a high frequency of calls, overflow will be taken by Merseyside. Details are taken and passed back to us to then mobilise to an incident if required. The problem is that if there are not enough Control Room Operators to deal with the frequency of calls, there won't be enough Control Room Operators to receive a call back from Merseyside. In relation to Grenfell Tower, we were not acting on behalf of London and were not taking their overflow, the caller was calling from within our area hence why we took the calls.

My role as a Crew Commander is to be one of the supervisors. A normal Control Room would consist of a Watch Manager, a Crew Manager and 2 Control Operators who would alternate between call handling and the management of admin/radio operator. The Watch Manager, or Officer in Charge, will be sat at the back of the room so that they can have an overview. The call handlers would be to their left and the radio

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operator to the right. Each position sits in a different area and this is done deliberately. As a supervisor, my role is to monitor and supervise, where necessary, the calls that come in and ensure that they are handled appropriately by the call handlers. My role also encompasses keeping a strategic overview of operational incidents and have the ultimate decision on mobilising in terms of numbers or types of appliances that would be required. As a Crew Commander, we have the option of amending the mobilising of crews and can make up or downgrade if we deem it appropriate based on the information that we have received. Ultimately this is based on our experience and knowledge. Crew Commanders will also deputise for the Watch Managers who have the overall command for the watch every shift.

The training I undertook as a Crew Commander involved a leadership and management course which resulted in a BTEC qualification. Similar to that of a Control Operator we would have a workbook that we would need to complete with different criteria having been met and to gain experience in a number of different areas. These areas would be in both a call handler and Watch Manager roles.

I have no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower or knowledge of any pre prepared fire-fighting plans for the tower itself.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I started my night shift at 18:00 hours. There was four of us on duty in the Surrey Fire Service Control Room. I was the Crew Commander on the night. The Officer in Charge was Claire STANBRIDGE. Caili ANDERSON was the primary call taker, and Laura WATERS was our secondary call taker.

It was a relatively quiet night for Surrey Fire & Rescue Service. During night shifts we have rest periods, where two members of staff have a rest, whilst the other two remain in the control room. At about 02:00 hours it was just myself and Caili ANDERSON in control. Claire and Laura were on their rest period.

At 02:30 hours our control received a phone call from a distressed female. Incident number 12115. Caili ANDERSON answered the call as the call taker and I monitored from the Supervisors desk. The female caller said there was a fire and a relative was trapped in an address that was hard to understand due to her level of distress. We believed she said 'Renfield Towers', flat 194 on the 22nd floor. Caili took the address and began to calm the caller down to help gather more information. 'Renfield Towers' was not appearing on our systems on Surrey ground, so I typed the tower name into Google, with no results. Whilst I was doing this, the caller told Caili it was in Latimer Road, London, giving the postcode of W11 1TG. This is when I knew it was in London. I stopped monitoring Caili's call and immediately called London Fire Brigade Control Room to pass on the information as it was time critical. Caili was left talking to the female caller.

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It took a while for London to initially answer the phone, but a female operator did eventually answer. I passed through the details of our call saying we had a call from a female saying a person was trapped in flat 194, 22nd floor of Renfield Towers, London, W11 1TG, giving incident number 12115. The London operator confirmed the tower was called 'Grenfell Tower' and that they were aware of it. After passing all the details to London, we were given the incident reference 76029. The call then ended. Caili told the female caller that the information had been passed to London, and the call ended.

After receiving this call, we still didn't know what was happening. So I looked on BBC News and Google to see if they had any live feeds to help us get a sense of what was happening. There was nothing being reported at that point.

A short while later at 02:47 hours, a second call came into our control room, incident number 12116. Caili answered the call and I monitored as the Supervisor. It was the same female caller who called 10-15 minutes earlier. The female said that her partner was still on the phone to a relative in this flat. You could hear a male crying in the background of the call, and this is when we established that the relative was the females' father-in-law. We established that the father-in-law was 70 years old. Caili obtained the telephone number for the father-in-law who was trapped in the flat and said to the caller that she would pass the information onto London Fire Brigade.

Caili ended the call and immediately called London Fire Brigade control room to pass on the information from this second call, including the telephone number we had obtained for the father-in-law who was trapped inside the flat. I listened into this call to monitor what was being said and to see if the London Operators were still sounding under pressure from what was happening. They did still sound as though they were under pressure and rushed.

I decided that we would not call the telephone number given to us by the female caller. Calling the number and giving advice could muddle up any rescue operations that were in place by the crews on the fire ground. I was not aware of what was happening or any fire-fighting plan, and I was not given any advice by London when I initially called them. The advice we may have given could have been more dangerous for the person in the flat. There would have been more risk if we had called, and not London. This is the reason why we passed the number onto London.

After the second phone call Sky News had started to report a live feed of the fire. We have the Sky News Channel switched on in our control room and use it as a tool to assist us and build a picture of an incident. I could see that the tower was engulfed in flames and was escalating quickly. My immediate thoughts

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were that it was going to be really difficult to attempt a rescue, especially on the 22nd floor in relation to the calls we were dealing with.

At 03:07 hours we received another telephone call in our control room. Incident number 12117. Caili answered the call and I again monitored from the Supervisors desk. The caller was the same female who had called at 02:30 and 02:47 hours. The female sounded more distressed during this call. She said that her father-in-law could see flames and a lot of smoke inside the flat. On hearing this I was worried that it was now half an hour since the first call and nobody had got there. I immediately called London Fire Brigade Control Room and passed on this information that the person now had flames inside his flat. The Operator told me that they were now giving advice to people telling them to wrap themselves in something wet and try to get out. I acknowledged this. The Operator also asked if I could contact surrounding Fire Brigades and relay this information to them, just in case they had received any calls about the fire.

At 03:11 hours, Caili ANDERSON called the female caller back and relayed the information that London had passed on to me, saying that she needs to tell her father-in-law to wrap himself in something wet and try to get out. The female said that he was elderly with mobility issues and couldn't do it. The call then ended.

At the same time, I called Kent Fire & Rescue Service, passing on the information from London that people were to wrap themselves in something wet and try to get out. After that brief phone call, I immediately called Essex Fire & Rescue Service telling them the same thing.

After this we did not receive any more phone calls in relation to the fire, only the three from the same female caller.

A short while later, Claire STANBRIDGE and Laura WATERS came back in to the control room from their rest period. I briefed Claire and updated her as to calls we had taken within the half an hour period, informing her that we may receive further calls with the incident still taking place. I stayed in the control room for a bit to see if any more calls came in, but they didn't. Myself and Caili then went away from the Control Room to take our breaks. These breaks can be three hours but we may be recalled if required. I remember just resting away from the control room and my mind was racing thinking over the calls we received and whether we did the right thing. I didn't feel like we could do a lot in Surrey. We didn't have that much control over the calls we received, especially around giving advice to the caller as it was not our incident and London didn't pass on any advice until we received the third call.

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Just before I finished my shift at 09:00 hours on the Wednesday morning, London Fire Brigade called our Control Room requesting details of all the calls that we had received in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire. I emailed the London Fire Brigade control room and cc'd in our Group Commander Bryn STRUDWICK. The email included brief details of the calls, incident numbers and confirmed that any recordings can be provided by Group Commander Bryn STRUDWICK.

After this request, I finished my shift at 09:00 hours.

Post incident we had a critical incident de-brief where it was an opportunity for both myself and Caili to get things off our chest. I remember that it had been in the back of my mind as to whether the father-in-law in flat 194 survived the fire. I remember glancing through the Guardian newspaper one day and saw a 'missing persons' page and noticed that a male from flat 194 was missing. It was an incredibly tragic event and I hope it doesn't happen again.

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