

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: FLANAGAN, BRIAN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 9 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. FLANAGAN

Date: 10/11/2017

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

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This statement refers to my attendance at the Grenfell Tower Fire on the 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017.

I am Brian Flanagan, pay number [REDACTED]9D, a firefighter in Red Watch at West Hampstead Fire Station, A41. I have been a firefighter for twenty (20) years and have been based at West Hampstead for the last fourteen (14) years. Prior to that I have worked at Kentish Town and at Hayes. On the night of the fire I was assigned to be the driver of a Pump Ladder with the call sign A411. The crew on the pump was at minimum strength and there was only four (4) of us; Crew Manager Greg YEOMAN who was also acting as watch manager and Firefighters Luke COOK and Anthony NELSON.

I had never been to Grenfell Tower or any similar block in that area before and was not aware of any specific firefighting plan for that tower. I have received training in firefighting at high rise blocks of flats. We regularly talk through different scenarios at the station as a watch and how we would respond and high rise blocks have been included in that. I cannot remember exactly when we did that but we talk through the scenarios every few months. On the area that we cover, we do visit different buildings and blocks looking at where the dry risers and hydrants are so that we know where to park the engines and what tactics we can use in the event of a fire there.

I have also taken part in a live training exercise for firefighting in high rise blocks about five (5) years ago. This took place at the police training centre in Hendon in the disused tower blocks that used to be on the site. The training involved rescuing dummies and various bits like that. I found it beneficial and

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thought it was a good training exercise. We also have breathing apparatus refresher training every year at Park Royal. This simulates a fire in a basement or flat and we practice hose techniques, fire extinguishing and search and rescue. I completed this earlier this year in about March. All of the training that we receive relates to compartmentation working and the fire being contained in the flat. I have not received any training about what to do when compartmentation fails but we are told to treat the situation as we find it and if people are in danger then we should get them out. Otherwise we are told that people should stay put in their flats as they should be safe in there and a mass evacuation could make things harder for the fire brigade as exit/entry routes can become blocked.

There are two fire engines based at West Hampstead; A pump and a pump ladder. The pump carries basic equipment and the pump ladder is a rescue machine and carries breathing apparatus. The call sign for the pump was A412 and this also carried a crew of four. A412 was already out at a different call when we got the shout to go to Grenfell Tower.

The night of Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017 was Red Watches first night shift. We had started work at 20:00 hours and it was like any other night shift. I had gone to bed at about midnight at the beginning of our stand down period. On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at approximately 01:25 hours, the sirens went off and we got the call over the loud speaker to mobilise. The four (4) of us went got ready and got in the fire engine. The details we received was that we were being sent to a twenty pump fire at Grenfell Tower in the North Kensington area.

I drove straight there with one of the guys in the back directing me to the tower as I was unsure exactly where it was as it was off West Hampstead's area. It took approximately ten (10) minutes to get there and we approached the tower from the east, going down WALMER ROAD. About thirty (30) seconds before we arrived at the tower we got our first view of it in a gap through the buildings. We were five hundred (500) to six hundred (600) metres away from the tower and I could see flames from top to bottom on the side of the tower visible to us. The whole of this side of the tower was on fire and, as we could not see the other sides, it looked like the whole tower was on fire. I was shocked by the severity and how bad the fire looked.

As I drove we had the radio on in the fire engine and could hear all of the talk on the radio about what was happening at the tower. I could hear that fire survival guidance was in progress which is where someone has called in who is unable to escape the fire and needs rescuing. The radio controller was listing all of the fire survival guidance calls that were coming in from different flats and the list of flats

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was enormous — the controller did not stop talking for the duration of the journey. From this it was apparent as to how serious the fire was.

From WALMER ROAD I drove on to BOMORE ROAD and, at approximately 01:35 hours, parked on BOMORE ROAD at the junction with GRENFELL ROAD. This was about two hundred (200) metres away from the tower but I could not get any closer due to the number of fire engines already in front of us. I had actually attended the same estate that Grenfell Tower was on the previous week, responding to a fire alarm going off in a different building, and parked the fire engine in the same place as I had parked on that occasion. Up to where I parked the fire engine, I had not had any difficulty getting the engine down the roads on the approach to the tower.

When we got out of engine the first senior officer we saw was Watch Manager Alex CARDY who now works at Willesden but used to be a crew manager at West Hampstead. He told us to get to breathing apparatus (BA) set so and go to the bottom of the tower. All four of us immediately got kitted up. From where we parked we had a different view to the tower to that of when we had seen it on our approach. I could see that it was only the side to the right of the main entrance that was on fire so it did not look as bad as I had initially thought but was still very serious. I had never seen a fire like it for size on a residential block and for the way the exterior of the building was on fire, not the inside. From my experience, the inside of the building catches fire first and then punches the windows out and spread to the outside, but on this occasion the windows were still intact and the outside of the building was on fire. As the fire was only on the outside of the building, I thought that it would be ok to go inside the building but was still apprehensive due to the size of the fire.

We walked down GRENFELL ROAD to the main entrance of the tower. I could see that there was already a big hose known as a jet set up outside spraying water onto the tower. On the way to the tower we saw the Willesden crew, who had already been inside the tower and one of whom had their hands in a bucket of cold water. We briefly spoke to them and they told us a little bit about the fire and that they had been attempting rescues but some residents had to be left behind.

This conversation took place just outside the building and I could see bits of debris falling off the building whilst still alight. It looked like a war zone with the debris falling and people everywhere. There were lots of paramedics with trolley beds and a few police officers who were struggling to move the crowd back away from the tower as they were massively out numbered. It was really noisy with people shouting and

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the debris falling. None of the residents or people outside other than the Willesden fire crew spoke to us but I could see that some of the residents were filming the fire.

We entered the tower through the main door and went into the lobby area. The main door was open. I do not know how it was being held open but it was intact. I have drawn a map of the lobby area which I produce as BFL/1. Through the main entrance door there was a basement room to the left and a stair case on the right. Up the stairs there was a mezzanine floor from which you could access the main flight of stairs in the building. At the bottom of the main flight of stairs was where the entry control point, also known as the bridgehead, was for the fire. This is the point where you give in your electronic tab from your BA set and it allows the control officer to monitor your situation and alerts them if you get into difficulty and need assistance.

The lobby was already filled with firefighters when we entered who were in a queue to get to the entry control. I paired up with Luke COOK and Greg YEOMAN paired with Anthony NELSON. We joined the queue and waited patiently with the other firefighters. I have never quite seen anything like it, everyone was shoulder to shoulder and the queue went all the way from the entrance door, up the stairs to the entry control. We queued for about ten (10) minutes before we reached entry control at approximately 0140 hours. Whilst we were in the queue various different bits of equipment that were being requested by entry control were being passed on along the queue, from the entrance door up the stair.

Entry control was being managed by two (2) watch managers, acting as the entry control officers. One I recognised from North Kensington Station but whose name I do not know and the other I did not recognise. They were giving out tasks to the firefighters who were then going up the main staircase. Prior to speaking to these watch managers, we were not given any kind of briefing.

Initially me and Luke were tasked with taking a spare breathing apparatus set up to a crew from Paddington who were up on the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) floor of the tower. We were told the set was for a casualty who the crew were trying to bring down the stairs. Occasionally a spare set might be taken up for a firefighter who needs it but I have never heard of this happening for a casualty. We grabbed the set which was at entry point and were about to start climbing up the stairs when another crew came down the stairs and took the set from us. They did not say anything to us and I do not know who there (they) were or where they were from but they immediately went back up the stairs with it. They may have been the Paddington crew coming down to get the set themselves.

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As the task that we were given was now done, we were given another task by the entry control officers. We were told to take one (1) or two (2) hoses each up to the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) floor. The hoses are twenty-three (23) metres in length but are kept rolled up until they are used and are quite heavy. We were not given any direction on what to do when we got to the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) floor; we were not told to fire fight to do any search and rescue so I assumed that there was already a crew up there that needed the hoses. We took the hoses and started making our way up the main flight of stairs.

When we reached the fourth (4th) floor on the stair case we suddenly came into very thick black smoke. It was like there was a duvet over your head and I could not see anything, even my hand in front of my face. It was impossible to see exactly where you were going. The staircase was the same the whole way up so I was able to make my way up it knowing the layout of it from the first few flights which were not smoke logged and using the walls and bannister as a guide when I needed it. I bumped into a few things on the way up, some of which I think were people but I could not see anyone or exactly what it was that I bumped into. The stairwell was very noisy, I could hear bangs and pops of what I think might have been doors opening and closing. I could also hear people screaming and shouting.

I lost track of exactly what floor we were on as we were going up but when we got to about the fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) floor the smoke suddenly cleared. It was like a light had just been switched on. I could see clearly again and there was no smoke at all. I thought we must be climbing up the stairs faster than the smoke was rising. I could now see the floor numbers again so me and Luke decided to run the last few flights of stairs up to the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) floor. We did not see anyone on the stairs above the fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) floor until just before the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) when two (2) firefighters came out of the door to the lobby on the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) floor. I asked them if the hose was for them but they said no and went down the stairs past us.

There was no-one on the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) floor that I could see so I thought that maybe they were going to send a crew up behind us to fire fight once the hoses were already up here. It is important to follow the instructions that we are given in incidents like this. We are not told the whole plan so if we do not do exactly what is asked of us then we could mess up the plan for other firefighters who will be tasked according to what we have done. We put the hoses in the stairwell next to the door for other firefighter to use. They were left in the stairwell because that is where a fire fighter team would set up to fight the fire outside the lobby on that floor as it should be a smoke free zone. The dry riser is normally in the stairwell so the hose can be setup and once ready, they can enter the fire area and effectively fight the fire.

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Having put the hoses down, we started to come back down the stairs. Both myself and Luke had some air left so we decided to knock on the doors of some of the flats and try and reassure the residents that we were there dealing with the fire and that they should stay in their flats. We came down to about the sixteenth (16<sup>th</sup>) or seventeenth (17<sup>th</sup>) floor and entered the lobby area through the door on the stairs. There was no smoke whatsoever on in the communal lobby on this floor and the lights were on providing good visibility. I knocked on a few doors and Luke knocked on the others on the same floor. The only one I got an answer from was either 113 or 133, I can't be sure exactly which. I went into the flat which answered, with Luke following in behind me, and the (there) was a black man, two (2) black women, one of whom was wearing a fuchsia dressing gown and the other was of a large build, there were two (2) black children of three (3) or four (4) years of age asleep on a bed and also in the room were two (2) young Middle Eastern men with short black hair. One of the Middle Eastern men was quite panicky about the fire.

I tried to calm them all down, telling them that there was no smoke on their floor and giving them advice on how to stay safe. I had to make a decision about whether to leave them in the flat or whether to take them down the stairs and out the building. Myself and Luke would each have to carry a child down the stairs. This in itself would be challenging with such little visibility and it would also make it difficult for us to help the adults as well. The smoke was so thick that it would be difficult for anyone to breathe in the stairwell without breathing apparatus and it would be unlikely that the residents would have been able to make it down without any help from us or without any breathing apparatus. As far as I was aware, the fire in the block was still at least over ten (10) floors further down on the fourth (4th) floor and although I had seen it all the way up the outside of the building, it had not entered the building at any place. There was no smoke in the flat that I was in. I decided that it would be riskier for me and Luke to try and rescue them at this point as I did not think that they would have made it down the stairs. I knew where they were and once I had made it down, I could tell other fire fighters who could then come and rescue them in a large enough crew and with the right equipment to do so safely. With the fire so far down below and as the smoke had not made it up to this floor yet, I thought that there would be enough time to get another crew up to do so, before the smoke and fire spread this far. This was also in line with fire brigade policy that people stay put unless the fire was inside their flats. I had not been told that this advice had changed in anyway. For these reasons I decided to leave them in the flat.

I told the group to put towels covering the gaps around the door frames to stop smoke from getting in and to hang something from the window so that which flat they were in could be seen from the outside.

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We left them in the flat and went back outside in to the communal lobby area. We checked the air level on our breathing apparatus set and they were starting to run low. Standard breathing apparatus lasts for about thirty-one (31) minutes if you are not doing any activity. When you are rushing around doing the activities that are done at a large fire like Grenfell the (they) last for a much shorter time which I would estimate is about twelve (12) minutes. As the air was starting to run low we decided that we better head back down the stairs.

When we went back into the stairwell, the smoke had risen up to the floor at which we were but was thin at this height. It also felt much hotter than it had done before. The further down we went, the hotter it felt and the smokier it became. Going down, I found that I was able to see a small amount and could make out other firefighters and see what was happening as far as one end of a flight of stairs to the other. The stairs were full of firefighters and became clogged with people. There were firefighters coming up whilst others were going down and some were carrying and dragging out occupants of the tower, coming out at various different floors. Where this was happening, it slowed down everyone's descent of the stairs and when we got to about the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) floor, it came to a complete standstill. There were firefighters behind us also stuck and I could hear the low pressure whistles on the sets of some of those behinds us going off. The low pressure whistle means that there is on three (3) to four (4) minutes worth of air left in that persons set. I shouted down the stairs that there were people running out of air to try and get people moving down the stairs and after a brief delay we got moving down again.

As we went down the doors to each floor were shut unless they were in use by the firefighters and at one point Greg YEOMAN and Anthony NELSON came out of a door in front of us and also went down the stairs. I remember seeing casualties being carried down the stairs by other firefighters and wondered if I should have tried to bring the people that I had spoken to down. By this point though I was too low on air to go back up and get them.

When we got down to the first (1<sup>st</sup>) floor, I found that entry control had been moved up there. We retrieved our tabs and shut our sets down before making our way down past the queue of firefighters who were waiting to get to the entry point. I think I was inside for about fifteen (15) minutes. As we went past the queue, I saw a crew from Euston Fire Station who I know. I told them about the people on the sixteenth (16<sup>th</sup>) floor who I spoke to and asked if they would be able to go up and get them. They said ok but I do not know whether they did or not.

I spent the next few hours stressing about the people that I had left in the tower, but about four (4) hours

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after I went out of the tower, I saw the woman in the fuchsia dressing gown in one of the triage areas outside the tower which gave me a bit of peace of mind.

It took me about five (5) minutes to get out of the tower once I had gone out of entry control. We left the tower by the main door and walked back to our fire engine down GRENFELL ROAD to replace the air cylinders on our breathing apparatus sets so that they were ready to use again. I was expecting that due to the seriousness of the fire, we would be required to go back into the tower again which we would not be able to do unless we had a full cylinder of air.

Our fire engine was just inside the police cordon that had been set up on GRENFELL ROAD junction with BOMORE ROAD. There was one female police officer trying to keep people back away from the tower who was outnumbered. I shouted at some people to get back and let us do our job and also tried to calm them down a bit. I cannot remember any specific interactions with people there.

By the time we had changed the cylinder it was about 02:15 hours and we headed back down Grenfell Road to Grenfell Tower. The Willesden Crew were still by the entrance to the tower and I briefly spoke to them again about what happened inside the tower before we went over the green in between the tower and the sport centre. I bumped into Chris DORGU, a firefighter from North Kensington. He told me about the initial call that he had attended as one of the first fire engines to respond. He told me that it was a single flat fire that his crew had put out.

At this point I realised that I had become separated from Luke and the other firefighters from West Hampstead Station. I started looking around for them as we would be required to re deploy in a pair so it was important that I found him so we were deployable. I was looking around for about fifteen (15) to twenty (20) minutes. By this time the fire had gone crazy and was knocking out windows due to heat. The fire was then spreading into the building through the holes left by the windows that had come out. Curtains next to the windows were catching alight and then spreading further into the flats. Around the outside of the building the fire was now spreading rapidly. It had spread around to the front of the tower, where the main entrance was, and was continuing to move around the tower quickly, now spreading sideways. Bits of debris were still falling (falling) off the tower, some bits the size of cars and it was all still alight.

I found out that on the other side of the building, close to the railway lines there was another fire ground, an area where fire fighters were gathering to be deployed and resting after they'd been into the tower. This

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was on the other side of the playground next to Grenfell Tower. I walked around to this area and found Luke and the others from West Hampstead Station gathered there. Me and Luke got ready to go back into the tower to be re-deployed. There were watch managers however controlling the holding area that we were in and who could go in to the tower. They were not letting any firefighters who had already been in to the tower go in again. We really wanted to get back in as this was before I had seen the people from the flat that I had spoken to outside and I felt guilty that I had not rescued them. I tried lying to the watch manager, telling them that we had not been inside but it was obvious from our appearance that we had as we were covered in soot. After a few attempts we gave up trying, took off our breathing apparatus and put them down on a wall.

The route that was being used for entry and exit by the firefighters had now changed from the main entrance to the tower to the one on the west side next to the playground. This went into the basement room of the tower and from there you could get to the main lobby. I am not sure exactly why the main entrance was no longer being used. There was a turntable ladder stationed in front of it and I think there may have been some debris that had fallen in front of it making it difficult to access but it was difficult to see exactly why.

Police TSG officers had turned up by this point and gave the brigade their riot shields to use to protect ourselves from falling debris as we went in and out of the building. Myself and Luke both took shields and used them to ferry firefighters who were going in and out of the building with them. There was about twelve (12) firefighters doing this, holding one shield each above our heads and escorting one (1) or two (2) firefighters between the building and the holding area. We were also helping to protect the casualties that they were bringing out. More of the riot shields later arrived and police officers joined in with doing the ferrying.

I did this for about two (2) to three (3) hours, making numerous journeys as and when required. At one point, when I was escorting a station or watch manager in to the building, a lump of debris fell on to the shield that I was holding. I did not really see it but it felt like it was the size and weight of a breeze block. If the shield had not been there to deflect it I probably would have been caused a serious injury. At the end of the night when I looked at the shield I had been using, it was covered in molten metal which I think must have fallen on it from the window frames.

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I was also doing sporadic equipment runs. Messages were coming out over the radios that particular equipment was required like sledge hammers for example. When these messages came out people would go looking for the equipment in the nearest fire engine available that had it and the equipment would then be taken in to the tower under the shields. I did various runs throughout the course of the night for different items.

Eventually the shields runs and equipment runs started happening less and less. We decided to go and get our breathing apparatus sets back on and see if we were needed to go back in to the tower. Once we were fully kitted up we went back to the holding area to get ready to go in when I heard a message come out over the radio for the driver of A411 to come and move the fire engine.

I made my way back to the fire engine and noticed that there was now a command unit parked next to me. I do not think that this had been there before. I was required to move my engine to let the relief crews who were coming in to take over gain access but my truck was blocked in by others. I had to wait for about an hour before I could move it and the rest of my crew waited with me by the truck. Other crews were waiting by their trucks to move them as well. By the time I was able to move the engine it was about 10:00 hours and we were released from the incident. When we left the fire was still going and the relief crews took over the firefighting. This was the first time I moved the truck since I parked it on our arrival. We were told to attend Paddington Fire Station for a de-brief which started approximately 10:30 hours and lasted about an hour. We got to back West Hampstead about 12:00 hours and was released from duty.

There are some things that I think could have been better in relation to the building. The smoke management system in place did not work properly. The stairwell should not fill up with smoke and should provide a safe route for firefighters and occupants of the tower to escape. This did not work on the night and as such people were left trapped in the tower. I think that there were self-closing doors on the stairwell. All the doors I saw that were not in use on the stairwell were closed. The stairwell was the only escape route and it was crowded enough with just firefighters using it. If there had been an additional staircase in the tower that was protected from smoke then this would have assisted us in getting the casualties out of the tower. The firefighting lift was not in use whilst I was inside the tower. I do not know why this was not being used.

I did not see any sprinklers in the tower and do not know where the dry riser was or if it was working. I did not look for either as my tasks once inside the tower did not involve either of them. I was also not

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aware of any fire alarms going off but it was very noisy in the tower and the surrounding area with people shouting and screaming and debris falling to the ground.

In relation to the firefighting equipment, everything seemed to work correctly. There were no issues with the radios that I was aware of and I was able to get hold of the people that I needed to and was contacted on the radio myself in relation to moving the fire engine. The height that the fire reached was an issue though and we did not have any ladders long enough to reach the top of the building which could have assisted the firefighting. The aerial appliance from Paddington that was there only reached seven (7) or eight (8) floors so was not effective. A larger one came from Surrey but by then it was too late and that was only used for damping down. Due to the layout of the immediate surrounding area to the tower, it was not possible to get more than one (1) aerial appliances close enough to spray water and therefore it was only spraying on one side of the tower. The access to the other sides was blocked by a pedestrian walkway, a leisure centre, there was a playground and the ground had been landscaped with steps. As we could not get appliances to the other sides, jets were set up on the ground. They only reached three (3) floors up and had very little effect at the tower. If we could have reached the other side with aerial appliances then we might have stood a better chance of fighting the fire.

I was not aware prior to this incident about the risks of cladding and the way the fire could spread on it. I knew that buildings had cladding on them but this was the first time I have seen cladding burn like this. The fire should not have been able to spread on the cladding the way it did. It was apparent upon arrival that it was the outside of the building that was on fire and once the windows started punching out then the fire spread to the inside. The fire burnt at over one thousand two hundred (1200°C) degrees Celsius and not much would have survived that, so it does not surprise me that the windows were falling out and melting.

I am aware of a previous fire on the Chalcots Estate four (4) or five (5) years ago where the buildings are clad in the same material as Grenfell Tower. I did not go to this fire but know people that did and saw the scorched building following it. I do not know why on that building the cladding did not catch fire but on Grenfell Tower it did.

I thought that the building might collapse or partially collapse. The fire had spread up vertically and then to the sides and you could see straight through the top corner of it. It did not look like there was anything supporting or holding it up.

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Overall I think that the fire brigade and firefighters did a good job. I was not injured myself but saw several firefighters with heat exhaustion who had to be cooled down. I have not received any medical treatment following the fire. I heard stories about people taking off their breathing apparatus sets and giving them to casualties and know of one firefighter who lost his hat and tunic and still kept going. I also heard one resident jumped out of the tower and nearly killed a crew manager by landing on him. The job was run very well by the senior officers. They all got involved and made sure we had what we needed to do the job in hand. Everyone was surprised and shocked at the fire but mucked in and got on with the job we had to do. It was managed the same way that any other incident would be but on a larger scale.

We had never prepared or trained for a fire quite like that and the way the tower caught alight from the outside. There was no contingency, procedure or plan as it had never happened like that before. We have only ever prepared for flats burning from the inside so considering that I think the fire brigade did a great job.

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