

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: ASHMAN, GREGORY

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 7 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: G ASHMAN

Date: 06/03/2018

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

This is a further statement in relation to the fire at Grenfell Tower that I attended on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

Following the earlier statement that I made regarding this incident, I was asked to answer further questions by DC BENNETT on 08/02/2018. My responses are summarized below.

In relation to training in high-rise procedures/policy, I cannot remember when I last completed training in these area prior to attending Grenfell Tower, however this is recorded on my electronic training record.

All Group Managers complete an annual incident command exercise organised by our training provider, BABCOCK, which could involve practice in dealing with high-rise incidents. We also have an online training system called Big Learning, which all LFB staff can access. This has training and learning documents on it that you can read and occasionally these will be about high-rise procedures. When LFB staff are promoted to Station Manager and Watch Manager rank in the LFB, and possibly Crew Manager rank, there are certain modules on the Big Learning system that you have to complete, some of which are about high-rise policies and procedures. In addition to this, we also have Ops News, which is a 6 monthly publication that everyone in the LFB gets which has the latest training in it and it details the statutory modules of learning that you have to complete. These modules are entered into electronic station diaries so that each station and firefighter completes that training. The Ops News has a red, amber, green (RAG) system prioritising these areas of learning. Red and amber areas of learning are both mandatory whereas green areas are topics where training don't necessarily need to be recorded as they covered in the Ops newsletter itself.

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As a firefighter, I did regular training at station using drill towers with built in dry risers to simulate high-rise incident. In these drills, we practiced everything that would happen at a fire such as getting everything out and set up as you would in real fire, getting all the equipment together that we needed and we set up a bridgehead. Once a year we also did a drill within an actual tower block on our ground and had a scenario where there was a fire within a certain floor. We didn't use any water but again we practiced organising and taking in the equipment we needed, and from an officer's perspective, thought about what resources we needed to deal with the incident.

I was personally involved in a simulation 4 or 5 years ago at Tolworth Towers in Surbiton, which is a 20-storey office block. The company who owned it allowed us to have two floors to the building to use for an exercise. These floors were filled with artificial smoke to simulate a high-rise fire with multiple casualties. A mixture of live casualties and dummies were used in the exercise who needed to be rescued. The dummies had hot water bottles attached to them so that they had a source of heat and could be seen using a thermal imaging camera (TIC).

Within the last 3 years, an annual event has also been run within each LFB borough involving all watches called Back to Basics. In these events, they again simulate different types of fire incidents. Last year's theme was basement fires, which was chosen following a firefighter fatality at the Balmoral Bar in Edinburgh where there was a fire in a basement. To simulate this type of incident we used a basement in the Stag Brewery in Putney, which we filled with artificial smoke to practice firefighting in basements. The year before that, the exercise was on high-rise firefighting following a fire at Shirley Towers in Hampshire where two fire fighters were killed. For this training, we used Acton fire station's drill tower to simulate a high-rise incident. We weren't able to use an actual building for this event, as we couldn't find a suitable venue on our ground due to the fact that not many companies will allow us to use their premises for these exercises.

At training school, I learnt more about of the theory and practicalities of how our equipment works and the correct high-rise procedures and policies. I also learnt about building construction in terms of high-rise incidents but the majority of the practical training is delivered once you are posted to a fire station. How realistic our high-rise training is, depends on how it is organised. When we can carry out simulations at actual tower blocks it is very helpful, but it's not as realistic when we use a drill tower. However, the drill towers are helpful in literally drilling into the firefighters the on arrival tactics for high-rise fires. This therefore means that the incident commander doesn't have to tell the firefighters what to do at a high rise incident, as they should know what their role is and what they need to do from this training. They

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might know the specifics of where they go at each incident but they should know their role. For example, if they are assigned to wear BA that is what they will do, if you are the driver you will normally be the pump operator at an incident. At some fire stations, the pump ladder crew are responsible for the rescues whereas the pump crew will sort out the water supply. As firefighters, we have on arrival tactics drilled into us for years, hence the term drill. Therefore, if I turned up at a certain type of incident now I would still know the general on arrival tactics to be implemented.

I'm not aware of a pre-prepared firefighting plan for Grenfell Tower but I have not worked in that area until I attended the fire on 14/06/2017. Our operational response database (ORD) displayed on the MDT in the fire appliances should hold information that we need to know as firefighters about certain buildings. It would list what the hazards are for a building, what the tactical plans are for that building and the access to it. There is a different entry for every tower block or building that is deemed to require an entry onto the ORD. Some buildings will also have a pre-prepared plan of what to do in case of a fire, organised by whoever manages the building. When I worked in the borough of Wandsworth, Wandsworth Council did this for all their social housing buildings.

The LFB take a lead from national operational guidance in terms of their policies and procedures. This is national guidance which is adapted by each fire and rescue service for their area. I don't believe there was a specific plan or policy concerning when compartmentation fails in high rise buildings, as it is not supposed to fail. You can anticipate some compartmentation failure in a very intense fire or a long burning fire but not to the extent at which compartmentation appeared to fail at Grenfell Tower. I was also not aware of the risks regarding cladding panels prior to Grenfell Tower. But I was aware of a similar product known as sandwich panels, used in the construction of warehouses and cold stores, but not on residential premises.

The stay put policy also comes from national operational guidance. This policy is based around the fact that normally, people in high-rise buildings will be safer staying in their flats when there is a fire in their block than they would be coming out of their flat and traveling through a potentially harmful atmosphere to escape, including smoke and heat. There could be a fire in one room within a flat that doesn't leave that room or flat. If everyone came out of the building, in that case it might prevent fire fighters getting into the premises quickly to rescue other people and prevent firefighting activities. Normally at a HR fire, people in that flat concerned will leave but we would usually be able to put the fire out quickly enough that other people in the block might not even know that there had been a fire.

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I had not been to Grenfell Tower prior to attending the fire there on 14/06/2017, therefore I had not completed a 7(2) D visit there. When I was a firefighter I would have carried out several of these familiarisation visits but nothing that I remember on Kensington's ground, as I have never worked in that area.

In terms of access to Grenfell Tower, you should be able to park a pumping appliance within 20 metres of the dry riser at any premises to allow firefighters to plug into the dry riser inlet. The dry riser is a big tube that runs up inside a building and has outlets on the majority of floors where hoses are connected. As long as the dry riser inlet is charged with water coming in from a fire engine outside you should be able to access water in the dry riser on each floor. As far as I remember, appliances at the incident were able to park within this distance of the main entrance of Grenfell Tower where the inlet was. However access to the building was also difficult due to the falling debris and they were still using riots sheets to enter the building when I arrived. I saw the dry riser inlet at the incident, which to the left of the main entrance of Grenfell Tower on the South elevation as I entered Grenfell Tower. I remember that it had charged hose leading into it at the time that I saw it. I wasn't aware of any problems with the dry riser at Grenfell Tower, however I didn't see the dry riser outlets inside the building, as I didn't go onto any of the floors other than the ground floor and 4th floor.

When I was inside Grenfell Tower on 14/06/2017, I did not open any doors that I can remember. As stated, other than the ground floor I only went to the 4th floor bridgehead. I think the door to the 4th floor may have been wedged open, as I don't remember opening it but I'm not certain of this. I didn't notice anything about the windows at Grenfell tower, as I didn't go into any of the flats. From my memory, there weren't many of the flat windows still in situ when I got there.

The fire at Grenfell Tower had already spread prior to my arrival therefore I don't know if firefighters kept a look out for external spread of fire. I'm not aware of a policy for this but I would anticipate that if officers did this they would have been given a briefing of what to look for in terms of movement of fire and simply used their eyes to monitor this or a thermal imaging camera (TIC).

In terms of resources being used to externally tackle the fire at Grenfell Tower, I remember that there was an aerial ladder platform (ALP) being used on the East elevation of the building. I think Soho's ALP was being swapped with Surrey's ALP when I arrived. There were also several 70mm jets working around the building, applying water onto the tower. I remember seeing one in the playground, as I had quick look around as I entered the tower but I can't remember where the others were specifically.

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I know there was a fire lift at Grenfell Tower, as every high-rise should have one. As I walked into the lobby of Grenfell Tower I saw a room to the rear left with a fire lift in it but I wasn't aware of whether it was working or not. If it wasn't working this could hinder firefighting activities as firefighters would have no control over any of the lifts in the building. There was only one means of escape at Grenfell Tower, this was via the stairs.

While I was at the incident, I didn't notice any issues with radio communications and I didn't have any problems using my handheld radio to communicate with Tim FROST who was at the bridgehead. I had to communicate with GM FROST on many occasions to confirm where crews were and the location of any of the deceased.

In terms of what would have helped firefighters to deal with the incident at Grenfell Tower, a fully functioning smoke extraction system and sprinklers.

I was also mobilised to attend Grenfell Tower on Friday 16th June 2017 at about 0830 hours and got to Grenfell Tower at about 0930 hours. Assistant Commissioner (AC) Richard MILLS was in charge at this time. I reported to him on the Command unit on Grenfell Road, which may have been CU7 that had been moved from its earlier position on Bomore Road but I'm not sure. AC Mills briefed me on the incident and gave me the role of sector commander for safety. However as AC Mills was so busy going to TCG meetings and attending to so many other things that were going on, I suggested to him that he remained the incident commander but that I took over as Operational Commander. I think I took on this role at around 1100 hours. Group Manager (GM) Pam APORACHA then took over as sector commander safety. At that time, we weren't firefighting in the building. We were liaising with DVI about body recovery and retrieval alongside the USAR firefighters. They were building a tunnel into the front entrance to provide access and to ensure that no one was hit by further falling debris. There was an inner cordon set up at the bottom of Grenfell Road where the road bears left towards the tower. You had to sign in and out and step through chemicals to be allowed in and out.

The fire was out as far as I'm aware and the main operational activity was going on outside. Plans were being put in place as to how to move forwards and gain safe access. There were a couple of fire engines still by the top of Grenfell Road and I think Surrey's ALP was still there.

After my initial briefing, I did a 360 of the building, took photos and confirmed what safety measures were in place and what was still needed. As operational commander, I liaised with GM Julian Spooner, the USAR officer to confirm what they were doing and what they needed. They were working with DVI and preparing to search the building. I think that there were quite a few bodies recovered on the Thursday

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and some on the Wednesday but by Friday I think it was getting to the point where each flat needed to be searched thoroughly and they were trying to put together as to how to search each flat safely. All of the USAR lorries were parked out the back on SILCHESTER ROAD and we were liaising with them on the grass area outside the leisure centre. I'm not sure if there were issues with stabilisation and confirming the building was safe to enter that were preventing them from getting in but I remember a lot of USAR firefighters were getting frustrated that they couldn't go in to get on with their job.

I also liaised with Alistair from the DVI, which was still in place outside the leisure centre, as we were also in charge of their health and safety. DVI were outside the North Elevation of the tower with the cadaver dogs. They had put out little flags where body parts were found but I didn't really see that. They told me, as the Operational Commander, to make sure that no one went round there.

Other than this, I was so tired from my shift on Wednesday 14th June 2017 at Grenfell Tower that I don't remember much else about the Friday 16th June 2017. I was just constantly liaising with people on the incident ground and in the command unit. I can't remember anything else of note and I don't think they had started searching inside before I left. GM Andy WORSAM relieved me from the incident at approximately 1930. I did not re attend the incident.

While I was at Grenfell Tower, I spoke to staff from the gas board when I was outside command unit 8 on Grenfell Road. There were 2 or 3 staff from the UK Power Network that were managers and a team of engineers but I don't recall anyone's names. I don't know whether I spoke to them on Wednesday 14th June 2017, or on Friday 16th June 2017 when I was mobilized to return to Grenfell Tower. If I spoke to them on Wednesday, it was probably to ask them what they were doing but if it was on Friday, they probably came to me to ask if they could do things, as I was the Operational Commander at the incident on that date.

I remember them stating that the gas cut off point was in the basement of Grenfell Tower. However, after several hours they then stated that they weren't able to cut off the gas supply in the basement. We then talked about access, as they asked if they could get a digger on site without disturbing what we were doing in order to dig up the road on the corner of Grenfell Road to cut off the supply. The UK Power Network staff eventually dug up the pavement with a JCB where the gas main was. I am not sure exactly how they cut the supply but I assume they did this to either access the valve there and turn it off or alternatively they may have turned off the supply somewhere else before cutting through the pipe and metal to stop the supply and capped it. I am aware that they eventually cut off the gas supply but again I'm not sure if it was on the Wednesday or the Friday. When I left the incident on Wednesday there were

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still pockets or fire within the tower, which I believe was due to not being able to turn off the gas, therefore it was most likely Friday that they were able to cut off the supply.

However, when they eventually cut off the gas supply, I think they also cut off the gas to block opposite the South elevation of Grenfell Tower, which I think was in Clarendon Walk or around that area. I also remember that near where Command Unit 8 was parked on Grenfell Road, there was a strong smell of gas coming from another smaller block of flats, which the gas board investigated. I'm not sure if they found a gas leak or not but they definitely came back to me about this.

When I was at the scene of the incident at Grenfell Tower on 14/06/2017 and 16/07/2017, I took several photographs, which I emailed to be DC BENNETT on 18/02/2018 at 1435 hours. Firstly, I took twenty-two (22) photographs of the FSG information and assigned crews written on the walls in the ground floor lobby of Grenfell Tower. I took these photographs between 0918 and 0921 hours on 14/06/2017. I exhibit these photographs as GSA/4 to GSA/25. I also took one (1) photograph of a cat on Command Unit 7 at 1032 hours. I exhibit this photograph as GSA/26. This cat had apparently escaped from Grenfell tower and we were asked to feed and look after it on the FSG Command Unit. We requested the RSPCA to attend however, after several hours the cat no longer wanted to stay on the Command Unit and it ran off. I believe it was found several weeks later near the scene and reunited with its owner. Finally I took one photograph on 14/06/2017 at 1231 hours of Grenfell tower, which I exhibit as GSA/27. When I took this photograph I was standing on Grenfell Road.

On 16/07/2017 I took seven (7) further photographs at the scene of the fire at Grenfell Tower between 1047 and 1049 hours. Four (4) of these photographs are similar and show the North West corner of Grenfell Tower, looking upwards. I exhibit these photographs as GSA/28, GSA/29, GSA/31 and GSA/32. I also took three (3) photographs showing the debris next to the North Elevation of Grenfell Tower, which I exhibit as GSA/30, GSA/33 and GSA/34.

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