

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: CHRISTMAS, HELEN

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

Occupation: WATCH MANAGER

This statement (consisting of 11 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: H CHRISTMAS

Date: 04/12/2017

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

The content of this statement represents a summary of my recorded interview with DC Peta JAMES and PC Roger REID, police officers from the Grenfell Tower Investigation team. The interview took place on Monday 4th December 2017 at HESTON FIRE STATION, 520 LONDON ROAD, ISLEWORTH, TW7 4HR, between approximately 10:50 and 13:20 hours. Below is a summary of the information I gave in my conversation with Peta and Roger. Martin CONWAY from the Fire Brigade Union was also present. For the full content, this statement should be read in conjunction with the transcript of the digital recording, which has since been transferred onto DVD-R master disc (exhibit RAR/1) by PC REID.

I began my career within the London Fire Brigade in 2000 initially at Chiswick for four years then moving on to Wembley where I spent seven to eight years before moving to Park Royal as Temporary Watch Manager. I spent two years there before moving on to my current role approximately eighteen months ago. I have performed many roles and worked through the ranks to my current status as competent Watch Manager for the last six months.

I have completed many training programmes, exercises, courses and lectures throughout my career as part of our ongoing training from Borough Training Plans and London-wide Training Plans. Throughout the year, we do numerous four and six pump exercises. On a daily basis, we have core skills to hit which are all programmed into the Station Diary. We are also a Technical Rescue Centre (TRC) here at Heston so we do extra training for Line Rescue, Water Rescue and Boat Rescue so we do spend a lot of time

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training on Station. On my Watch, most people are qualified in all of the skills that we have. The exception to that is Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) where we have five team members trained in that.

I am not fully aware of any pre-prepared plan for firefighting or search and rescue when externally compartmentation has failed in a high-rise block of flats. In high-rise, it's slightly different because you're always going with a forty-five jet. If you go into a residential house, it's within a specific compartment and there's no signs of backdraft or flashover. If it looks like it's contained within that room, you go in with a suitable firefighter medium such as a hose reel which is slightly smaller. However, if there are signs of it having broken out of that initial compartment then you go in with a forty-five. In a high-rise you will always go in with a forty-five, we've got ground monitors where you can fight fire from the outside, we've got Aerials that can fight fire from the outside but again they've got their limitations of what they can do and it's all dependent on water supplies as well. In terms of evacuation, yes we all know about individual flats and individual high-rises having their evacuation plans. For some of them it's phased evacuation and obviously the Stay Put Policy for some again so there is nothing I can think of for if the fire's got out due to compartmentation failing externally in a high-rise block.

We had minimal awareness regarding the risk posed by cladding panels. We do building construction training in lectures. These claddings were quite new to everybody here. That was quite a new thing. I'm sure we've all learnt quite a lot since. It's mainly the insulation panels we know about, like sandwich panels and their possibility of collapse but when they're actually a structural part of the building rather than just a fascia. Most warehouses have a frame and then insulated panels whereas these were stuck on the outside.

For high-rise procedures, our ongoing training would be dependent on what's scheduled into the diary so it will come under core skills. Breathing Apparatus (BA), exercises tend to be high-rise based if you've got the facilities to be able to do them. Our Back to Basics training was basement procedure last year and high-rise the year before and consisted of a case study and an exercise on the last occasion.

We use BA with two durations and both are compressed to 300-bar pressure. Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA), lasts for approximately 31- 33 minutes and Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA), lasts for approximately 50 minutes. The times in use depend on how hard you are working. You could drop the times massively as adrenalin and heat play big parts. EDBA is heavier than

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SDBA but neither are light to carry. I'm EDBA and SDBA trained. We have three appliances at Heston. The Pump Ladder has a call sign of G381, the Pump has the call sign of G382 and the Rescue Unit carried the call sign of G386. I ride the Pump Ladder and can also ride the Rescue Unit.

I'm not sure of the exact time when we received the call during night duty on Wednesday 14th June 2017. We were in bed when the pump went to standby for what was a 10-pump fire at that time. 15 minutes later the lights went down again and G381 got on what came out as now a 40-pump fire. Our Pump (G382) had also been mobilised from Chiswick. My crew of four (including myself), were Sue PERCY, Carrie WRIGHT and Christopher LANG.

The Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) on our truck was struggling. Messages were coming through but it was slow to update and there was lots of radio traffic. We were also unsure of the area so my two crewmembers in the back worked off Google as we headed in the direction of where it was to get us there through lots of roadworks.

The route we took was via SYON LANE, GILLETTE CORNER, M4, HOGARTH ROUNDABOUT, HAMMERSMITH then SHEPHERD'S BUSH. Not sure about the route taken after that. A 40-pump fire was unusual. We couldn't get to the RVP (Rendezvous Point), we'd been sent due to closed roads so did a loop and followed another fire engine in. We didn't see anything of the fire until we got there due to the roundabout route we had taken to get to it so literally when we pulled up was the first time we caught a glimpse of the tower.

I think there was an appliance in front of us as we parked up and I think there was also one behind us as we parked by the Leisure Centre on WALMER ROAD. Not sure of our arrival time but I think there were about 20-22 pumps there by this time. There was a reasonable amount of space for us to park (see A3 colour map exhibit HCH/1 for the spot where we were initially located), in WALMER ROAD. It was pretty self-explanatory of what it was. We literally saw lots of boardings in between so we couldn't actually see much.

The area had people scattered everywhere and lots of members of the public standing, looking, holding

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mobile phones and asking us to hurry. I had a quick chat with a pump ladder that was behind me. I couldn't tell you who it was.

He said, "Are you gonna go to the RVP?"

I said, "No, I'm going to leave it (our appliance), here".

He said, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "Just get sets", so I asked my crew to grab their sets.

My driver asked me if I wanted the truck locked. I said, "No, leave it open", just in case people needed to grab more and more gear. So we literally just grabbed sets and a couple of branches. A couple of members of the public pointed us through like a housing estate. We walked around BOMORE ROAD and saw lots of people and LAS. They had a triage kind of salvage-sheeted area working on maybe five people in that area (by the electricity sub-station on map exhibit HCH/1). There was another sheet on the floor-covering people who were deceased, probably two or three. Coming out from here were maybe another eight firefighters carrying two bodies. Visually the bodies looked like they were deceased.

From around here it then went in to chaos pretty much. There were firefighters everywhere looking exhausted; some with sets on their backs, some without. Most were just staring up at the tower.

We got to a point outside the Leisure Centre on our way to find the Command Unit and I saw someone I knew, Station Manager (SM), Dan KIPLING at BA Main Control. I asked him if he knew where the command Unit was, as I hadn't handed my board in yet. I got pointed in the direction of what I think was Grenfell Road (looking at exhibit HCH/1), and I believe the Command Unit was off there somewhere. I said to my crew, "Hang tight here while I go and hand the board in".

I went to my Command Unit and said, "Where do you want us?"

They just said, "Get BA, head back"

I said, "Ok"

The Station Manager here said to me, "H, have you got a job?"

I said, "No, what do you want us to do?"

He said "I really need a hand in setting up BA Main Control"

I said, "Ok, let's Get that sorted"

I said to my crew again, "Just hang tight for the minute", and asked him what he wanted from me and

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tried my hardest to help him get that set up there so there'd be some sort of structure because there wasn't a massive amount of structure understandably at that stage.

BA Main Control is for example, normally we have Entry Control, which can be anything standard from a single storey house where it's just keeping an eye on what's going on inside that job so someone will hand their tally in from their set. It keeps an eye on breathing rate, the air they've got, their consumption, the time they've got left and it keeps a record of where they are and what equipment they've got on. That's what we call Stage 1.

It can go to Stage 2 where for instance, you've got more than one Entry Control Point or you've got more than one board running or if it's a slightly more complex job. After that, it goes to Main Control Where there needs to be an overall control of resources for that breathing apparatus scenario or where there's an incident that is out of the extreme. I think in my career it's only the third time I've known it to be up and running. It doesn't actually happen that often.

At the start, I did say to SM KIPLING early doors that we need as much EDBA on this as possible and maybe suggest getting more pump ladders. I don't know, I've not seen the slip of when certain trucks were ordered, I know it went to ten, if I use early doors but I know that our Blue Watch took a minibus down and I know that they took a minibus down with only five people. It just felt like we needed to throw EDBA wearers at this early doors so anyone who was on duty at that time needed to get to it. I'm not sure how many we got early, early doors. I think there were some stations who weren't necessarily called on it who had EDBA wearers because we were running through them so quickly. I did suggest it straight away. Let's get as much EDBA here as possible and I think they got as many as they could but not straight away.

When suggestions such as mine are made we are a very small fish in a big pond. Even as a WM at something like that, you can suggest and your SMs, your Group Managers will listen and then they'll put through the request but it's probably been discussed at the meetings that they're having. All that sort of thing, so it's probably being looked at and it's just sometimes, you don't think it happens necessarily quickly enough but it's not always possible for it to happen that quickly. I would say that eventually the EDBA was the only resources that we were lacking initially but that actually came so it was probably ordered early doors. There were not enough of either EDBA and/or wearers initially. Getting up to the top

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and then back down again in SDBA was not happening although getting to the top in an EDBA is hard work.

On reflection, I think we could have done with more branches and TICs. Perhaps a unit that brings a some down.

SM KIPLING wanted to establish how many people out of the firefighters that were within that area had worn once. We wanted to get a defining area of fresh users and those who we just wanted to find something else to do. Also an area ideally for being able to do sets in, so change the sets so you could clean your sets and do a quick A-test on them, change the cylinder and they'd be ready again. You'd get your BA Main Control stuff from the Operational Support Unit (OSU), at that stage that wasn't there so we had to make do with what we'd got. So I was speaking with all the firefighters there trying to find out whether they'd worn if not put them into areas of where they could be, so fresh wearers, not so fresh wearers which was very difficult, seeing as everyone just wanted to get back in. I could tell when colleagues had been in despite some trying to play down how often they had done so.

Every truck has spare cylinders on it so we got an area set up with a few salvage sheets. Salvage sheets are like a big ground sheet basically, and you want to try and change your set in as clean a situation as possible. Obviously not doable on a fire ground so we make do with what we can and got people to get all the spare cylinders put the cylinders down, put any spare sets down, that kind of thing. We didn't have anything else at that stage. When we arrived there were literally people scattered absolutely everywhere so we wanted to separate them and get them away into certain areas. We had no BA Main Control Board at that time so we were using a Forward Information Board, which is a plastic board and on one side it has a large area where you can write information on and that was literally what we were writing on at the time of trying to work out how many BA wearers we've got, are they SDBA, are they EDBA, have they worn before? That kind of thing. A lot of it was done on paper at that stage. It was a bit of an issue as all of the firefighters were there watching it as well and they kept coming over and saying, "There's people up there" and at this stage it was still quite early so twice I went over to the FSG (Fire Survival Guidance), Command Unit and said, "You've got people on the..." (I can't remember what floors it was at the time), and in the end I kind of gave up on doing that.

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After that, I ended up saying to the firefighters who kept coming over "Do me a favour count what floor they're in count what window they're in, and go and speak with the Command Unit". I think by that stage, I know it was early but looking at the building at that time, I knew that was not going to happen for those people because of how the building was at that time. I couldn't say exactly what floors the flames were on but it was very intense and seemed to be travelling very quickly. A very, very intense fire from the outside. Very intense. I know it sounds crazy to say that but it was literally lit up and did seem to be travelling at quite a speed. The heat was not great from where we were and if it was, I couldn't feel it, plus I think when you are task orientated you don't actually really know. The wind did not seem to be coming towards us so smoke-wise, it wasn't too bad from our position. We weren't in any trouble from smoke or debris falling but I was there when the firefighter who'd been hit by the falling body came back so he was brought back and his set was impounded as much as we could do on scene which literally was putting his set into an area and taping it off then there were two police officers near it and then he was taken to hospital but I don't know if that's relevant.

Also, when I was, down here, I did request repeaters to be brought down from an FRU (Fire Rescue Unit) which are Telemetry Repeaters. There's a signal between a BA set and a BA board, which is a Telemetry Signal. That signal is not great in certain situations. Normally a good example is if you were going down in a basement or if you were going sub-sub basement. So you're going a long way away. On the Rescue Unit, we carry repeaters, which basically can increase the signal. They were brought down quite late on in the job. So you basically plug into the back of the board a signal box so to speak and then you can put further ones up and it's meant to get that connection stronger. An officer arrived from another FRU. They were still coming onto it and I said to him, "Can you get them brought down?" So he brought them down, we gave them to the runner and they were taken in. Whether they were used or not I don't know.

In terms of making such decisions/suggestions like the one just mentioned, in something like that they're on scene because we've got the trucks there. Not necessarily all Senior Managers would necessarily pick up everything that they need to remember hence why it's handy to have ideas thrown at them. We don't think of everything do we when we're on the job then someone goes, well "Have you thought about this?" and you say, "No I haven't but thank you", that kind of thing. So we'll give them an idea and being from a specialist station we kind of know what we carry as well so what options we've got if it's not working, let's look at something else. So you can suggest it, whether it gets used or not is a different thing.

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I did not stay there the whole night. Maybe about an hour, could have been more. I wanted to go in and I said to the Station Manager,

“Guv, I want to go in”.

He said, “Do you mind if you stay with me for a bit?”

I said ‘No, that’s fine’ but you’re obviously itching to get in there.

So I stayed with him because I think he’d attempted to get a couple of other WMs to give him a hand beforehand and it hadn’t happened because everyone just obviously wanted to get in so I wasn’t going to just leave him. So I did as much as possible with him and for him with what equipment we had at the time. We still didn’t have a good system in place by the time I left the SM in this area. It started to get set up but not by the stage I’d left it. We managed to get the set areas in where they could be cleaned and changed.

I think it was just as I was leaving that the EDBA sets had arrived and I know there was an issue with EDBA sets. They’ve got battery packs in them and I know some were not charged so in the meantime EDBA wearers were taking an EDBA set off other wearers who’d just come out, doing a fire ground A-test and taking those sets in themselves. The battery pack powers the link between the EDBA and the Telemetry Board and obviously needs to be charged to get that link going. On the trucks, it’s not a massive issue because we plug them in individually. However, the ones which were stored, were not all fully charged.

SDBA wearers can only wear EDBA if they are qualified to do so. It’s a separate skill. SM asked if I still wanted to go in. I said, “Yes”, so I grabbed my set and went in with a colleague who had three months off and this was her first night back on. I told her to grab her set and off we went. We went to the west side of the tower, Sector 2 and waited for a reasonable time under the walkway. We got sent to the holding area close to the playground near where the police were taking firefighters in under riot shields. Police got us through there pretty quickly. I was wearing the white helmet and I got the impression that they wanted a few Watch Managers in there, as there were not many. We were left in the Bridge Head on the ground floor at that stage. Waiting there for probably an hour and a half. Conditions got quite bad in there. There was probably 25- 30 people held, SDBA and EDBA wearers waiting to be briefed to go up the stairs. It must have been about an hour and a half, two hours. It felt like an extremely long time. It was quite noisy

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in there.

Casualties were still being brought down at that stage. Generally if casualties are brought down there would normally be a call from above, someone shouting, "Casualty" and it will travel down and everyone would make way and let them be brought out. The only brigade members I saw suffer any injury or near miss was the guy who'd been hit on the back of his set and a couple of guys with pure heat exhaustion. I did not receive any first aid or medical assistance at the fire or after it.

There was a lot of noise from the Aerial (ladder), outside, a lot of noise from debris falling and the building was making quite a lot of noise at this time I'm guessing it was concrete spalling to be honest. Concrete's reinforced with rebar (reinforced bar), when it gets hot it comes away from that and that metal bar is the only thing that holds it structurally all together. So it's just the cracking that's happening. It felt like that building was probably going to come down so that was crap but there were still a lot of crews going in. They were trying to get the crews through as quickly as possible. I think, there were three or four boards running at this time with 10 wearers on a board relating to who was inside that tower at that time but they have to leave a certain amount free for an emergency crew should something go wrong. The emergency crew needs to be the same size as the biggest crew that has gone in and then you also need to leave another tally for a spare set to go in with them but I could not say exactly how many boards they had up and running. You can go up in as many numbers as they send you up in. You don't need to necessarily go up for a task such as firefighting or search and rescue. It can be carrying equipment or it can be anything that they feel.

We were next in line and they wanted a crew to go in just to carry hose up. They turned me away and said they would use me for something more rather than just lugging hose up. They were still looking at rank with regards to what jobs they had.

The Entry Control Point should ideally be in clean air; however, that was not going to happen. We all understood that but it was smokey and dark when we entered the building. Light smoke at first but becoming heavy quickly and really deteriorated while we were in there. Obviously, that was when the fire was travelling downwards as well so that deteriorated massively. They did bring in PPV (Positive Pressure Ventilation), which is like big smoke extractor fans. We don't actually use them on front line

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appliances in London. One of our specialist vehicles can deliver them though. I've never seen them in action. They're used for venting buildings however, in this situation it didn't work. You've got to have an ideal setup with an inlet and an outlet of open air and it just wasn't right. I did actually say to the Station Manager after it was up and running, "Guv, you need to stop this. It's not helping". It runs off a generator and added to the noise along with water dripping through ceilings and gathering quite deeply at the bottom. We would have got wet walking up the stairs anyway because of the amount of water coming out through the stairwell. It's not ideal but it's one of those things you just go with. The water hadn't actually gone through my gear by the time I'd gone into the building I probably sweated more than water going through it.

It was uncomfortable in there but there were a few chairs, which we gave to the EDBA wearers. Kit weighs about 11 kilos but we can wedge it against a wall to take the weight off. They were getting people in and out as quickly as they possibly could to keep some sort of control over the situation. You couldn't have sent more in than what was there because of the limited room on stairwells.

Dany COTTON came into the building when I was at Entry Control and actually came in to have a word before we went up into the tower with the firefighters I think Pat GOULBOURNE briefed us at this stage. It was quite a simple brief to the fifth floor, flat 31, there should be a hose up there charged for you. There were about three Watch Managers and Station Managers, there might have even been a Group Manager there and a Crew Manager was doing Entry Control.

We went in as a crew of five comprising Carrie, myself and 3 guys who I think were all from Ealing. I know two of them were, not sure of the third. We were tasked with the fifth floor, flat 31 I think and our role was firefighting. There was no firefighter's lift although we could not have used it at the stages when we were there. You normally have two entrances in and out. There was only one at Grenfell Tower. There didn't seem like there was a protected stairwell because the smoke was travelling through doors but that was also due to hoses holding them open and bodies holding them open on some levels so smoke was always going to travel. There were probably smoke alarms going off if I remember rightly, they were going off in rooms. I don't remember hearing much going off in the lobby in regards to that and I couldn't tell you if it was hard wired or individual rooms but going up you could hear them. I didn't see any sprinklers.

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The staircase was the only one as far as I know. A very small one. It felt very narrow. Not much wider than a desk. I know I was holding the rail to get up there but then it was a squeeze to get people down next to you when they were making their way out. You kind of were waiting at the little corner bits to let people in and out so it was a tight stairwell. It was not two person's width in fire gear nor with shopping bags probably.

Off the stairs, you went into a hallway area. That was pitch, pitch black with smoke. You couldn't see anything at all in there. We did have a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC), with us, which has a four-hour recording loop. They told us there was already a hose up there, which we managed to locate. The hose was charged from the Dry Riser main, which is water running up through the tower. They had massive water issues there but on this floor, they managed to get water. The hose was left on, but turned off at the branch when we had found it.

As we got up to flat 31 the conditions on that level wasn't too bad but the smoke got worse as we went further up. It was quite hot but not horrific, normal house fire hot. We passed a few firefighters on their way down. We did not pass any bodies on the stairwell. I don't think they were as far down as that. We had confusion with floor numbers because we couldn't find floor numbers whether there were numbers there or not, we certainly did not find them so we counted them basically off the double stairwells, which was slightly confusing as you were sort of going back on yourself with 2 flights of steps to a floor.

The flat we entered was the first flat on the left so we located it quite easily. Inside there was visible flame pretty much everywhere so it was just going in, putting it out, getting in a bit further and doing as much as we possibly could. We literally went into a flat fire where nearly 100% of the flat was alight. Ealing's crew went in first so myself and Carrie did hose management, so just feeding hose through from the stairwell. The boys came out and we took over from them. I think we rotated twice throughout it. We were limited to what we could do as we only had one hose length, which was controlled by pulling the on/off lever at the branch. We were literally firefighting as much as possible from where we could because we were limited to one length of hose so we couldn't actually gain entry all the way into the flat but at least we had water. I became aware that any floor above about the ninth did not have any water and that's where the main fire scenes were going on and they were going in without water. It was probably overrun from the

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three or four hoses running below it.

The windows in the flat were all out by this stage due to the intensity of the heat and we were very limited in where we could go within it. I could hear concrete spalling, myself breathing, kind of hear your crewmember; you could hear water from the ALP (Aerial Ladder Platform) outside and water from your own jet. We communicated in a muffled way but loud enough to just about be heard. I know they were not great but I did not have comms on my set. One of the boys had comms but I don't know how much radio traffic he sent through.

All crews have to be the same with what BA kit they wear so we all wore SDBA on that night going up Grenfell Tower. The guys were really low on air although myself and Carrie were still alright but we came out as a crew of five as their air ran low. We probably weren't up there for more than 18 minutes.

The TIC was handed over at Entry Control when we went out and I'm assuming it got passed straight to another team. It has a 4 hour recording process of thermal imaging and then needs to be downloaded otherwise it starts recording over itself. The old one used to just take photos what we use now is a better TIC as it records, it has a zoom option and you can also take temperatures with it. I have no idea what the readings were from our TIC.

We were treading on debris to get in and out and had to lift our legs up to progress and not fall flat on our faces. I saw a leg but did not see a body outside the building in Sector 1. I saw this while I was still in inside of the tower looking out. I also saw a man with goggles being carried out who was alive at the time.

As we came out of the flat, back down and exited, it was now daylight. From the outside, it just seemed to be alight in the core of that building on quite a few levels. I remember thinking the windows looked very narrow. I don't know how easy it might have been to get somebody out of one of those if we'd had an opportunity to. The man who seemed to be at the window for ages was on the front, Sector 4. I don't know what floor, maybe 11, he was the Chinese guy who had been on the news. We were in Sector 2 when he was brought out.

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There was lots of visible flame and really thick smoke, the scene was like a war zone. Firefighters were staring up at the building all day but I would not have thought they were tasked specifically for that. The jet that I saw was targeting bits that were falling down from the tower. The jet running from the back ran no higher than the third or fourth floor as we didn't have it anywhere near because of the debris falling so it was quite far back in the playground area. It was very frustrating but we would not have got much higher with that appliance with the jet anyway. There were issues with the aerials. It's a well-known problem. The ALP had no water when we first arrived but I think one of my crew members got that sorted. There were issues with water supplies and I know Thames Water can redirect water if necessary. To improve we need a larger ALPs, better access to the building, better barry sets and everybody with comms.

We came out and dumped our sets off. I don't think I even changed my set to be honest I think I just dumped it off at the top by the Leisure Centre and then I got tasked with going down to the Holding Area in Sector 2 to assist them down there.

I spoke with SM KIPLING and he tasked me. They had really bad communications between them SM KIPLING's work mobile had also died so he had somebody else's and he said, "Can I take your mobile number?"

I had my mobile on me, which I will openly admit so we were speaking to each other from those areas. Officially, we are not meant to have mobile phones on us however, for me, family is obviously very important and you want to be able to contact family so as long as you go with the policy of having it on silent I don't actually see an issue with it. If the guys want to carry those they'll have a word with me and I'll be like, "Fine, just don't use them inappropriately", and that day showed that we should all have mobile phones, especially officers; one hundred per cent. I've got no issue with using my mobile phone for brigade stuff as well. It was needed because we had no comms at all between us and you couldn't do it by hand radios because there would not have been enough channels so mobile phone was the best option to do that hence why senior managers all get given mobile phones but batteries only last a certain amount of time. There needed to be some sort of communications for officers if they're going to be at this incident command posts using their own mobile phone, it's not really good enough. Trucks get given a mobile but there's three numbers programmed into it and that's all you can use or you can receive

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incoming call. The signal is often poor.

I had no radio contact in the actual job at Grenfell and I'm not sure of how many radio channels may have been used at the time, as I had nothing to do with that side of it.

I was with SM Brett LOFT who was in charge of that sector and I went and assisted him. This basically involved getting the resources because we didn't want everyone to go down there because it would just be too many people so it was just getting the resources down from Main Control so there was more structure in place when I came out of the tower.

I could not even guess what time it was by now. It felt like we had been there for hours/days. Temporary SM Paul McBEAN came and took over from Brett with what we had been doing and I carried on with my role with him. We carried on as the system was working as much as was possible.

In terms of chains of command, incident commanders and decision-making, I was not really aware of what was going on. To be honest I don't necessarily expect to because in something so big you are tasked specifically to a certain area. I wasn't in charge of my sector because that a SM's job at that level but I was fully aware of what was going on in my sector. If you take on too much and you want to know too much else it also becomes a bit of an overload. You need to know what's risk critical happening in other areas but you don't necessarily need to know every detail in other areas. When we initially arrived, there wasn't much structure in place and that was my main part to start to try and get bit of structure in place. There was obviously communication from powers above because we were became successful in as many ways as was possible. Plans and structures were in place but with such a large-scale job you're only going to see a small percentage of it I did not necessarily have to know who was in charge at this stage for something that large. The chain of command may have changed around four times since I was there.

I did not know who the Incident Commander was at that stage. I presume Dany COTTON had taken over by that point, or was doing the walk around before taking over.

The Command Unit are normally at an incident when we get to it. They are normally there if we've made a job bigger and effectively made up their job or if it's a big job initially. I think there were two or three Command Units on by the time we got to it. One was dedicated FSG and then we obviously had our

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booking in Command Unit. Command Units get more of a controlled structure around everything with regards to not necessarily only us but people involved from other agencies, that sort of thing. I put my board in with one Command Unit and the FSG one and left it at that.

My crews had come out from their first wear. They'd gone and changed their sets then they'd come back again. By this stage, there were lots of fresh crews arriving as well.

However it's sometimes good to get a crew back in for that second wear when they know exactly what they're doing as SDBA wearers; purely for knowing where they are as they know locations, they know the layout of the building, they were ready to go, other people were still doing bits on their sets and that sort of stuff. I would say two is a maximum wear. There were people who I knew had gone in three, maybe four times and the difficulty there was trying to dwindle them out and say, "Look, have a rest, go and find something else to do"

In terms of the physicality of the role, one of the many things is hydration. Your gear doesn't leak heat in but it does not really let heat out so you're just literally wringing with sweat and trying to get that back on board is quite difficult. The intensity of the heat is going to drain you. You're carrying gear with you, the hose we use is not easy to move, it's very heavy, it gets caught on stuff, especially ones that we will use in a high-rise building, it's exhausting. Many are physically fit people and when you know your own crews and what they do most people are a little bit more sensible now and know their own bodies and capability. You could just see that day which people/crew staff were fit to go back in and those, which were not. Some were very red, very flushed, sweating but not sweating.

They say EDBAs are not to be worn twice unless in exceptional circumstances and I knew my crew would want to go back in. I made sure they were all alright and asked "Are you alright to go back in?" They said, "Yeah, we need to get back in there". I said "Alright, we'll get you in there then hopefully look at trying to get away", because we'd been there for hours and hours by that stage. So we got them back in again and then it was just on rotation.

I was there pretty much most of the day. I took myself off for a 15-minute break to get some coke and a chocolate. I had something to drink, some food, tried to catch up with the rest of my crew, found out

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where some were and found that one lot were still involved. Most of use gathered on the grass by the Leisure Centre at this stage. It was my choice not to leave site until we all left together.

I returned to my post after my break and was there for another couple of hours. It was a lot slower by now although the volume of crews was still high. I could not tell you who relieved us in the end. Paul McBEAN was still there as Sector Commander. I handed over. Don't know what took place on the whiteboard after that. I explained in my handover what I'd been doing and what we had within that area and what we had up at Main Control. By now everything was being recorded on a Forward Information Board, which formed part of the handover.

Police gained entry to the Leisure Centre quite early on as they wanted to use it as a temporary morgue rather than the bodies being left laid out so by now it was open and we waited in there for about 40 minutes. There were about four appliances in there. The Group Manager came in and said we had to attend a debrief at Paddington so we made our way there.

They tried but it was not the right thing to do after so many hours. There were drinks, food and clean t-shirts. They thought about it but as we are such a big station rather than getting us out we ended up waiting there for what I think was three and a half hours to four hours and it was a debrief with a Counsellor which is fine but everyone just wanted to go and have a shower. It was not an appropriate time to do it although I can see why they wanted to but we were all over it by that stage. In my opinion, the chat could have happened at a later stage.

We got back to Hounslow at 6:30pm and were due back on duty at 8pm. We could have taken 4 hours off but all wanted to get back on the run. I sent two home, as they were not going to be fit for duty. We went back on the run at 8:30pm and our ladder got called out straight back to Grenfell as standby relief. The Group Manager there sent us back after an hour and a half. We picked up some gear that we had lost and then came back.

I had never been to Grenfell Tower or the North Kensington area prior to being called there on the day of the fire. I have been on standby to get there once but that was all. Straight afterwards I just wanted to get home after I had finished my deployment.

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In terms of Fire Survival Guidance (FSG), if there's a call from somebody who's within a building and they can't get out or they potentially can get out then they'll be given advice from control. You can also get what they call third party FSGs which, for instance, may be someone in London, they ring someone in another country, and that person abroad rings London's control. Control stays on the line with the caller throughout. The call to the Control Room alerts the Fires Station and Control stays with the person online.

Stay put advice from previous incidents suggests that a concrete building should have at least one hours fire protection side to it. That night it was hot windows were open there was an unusual spread of fire, and it looked like gas was potentially an issue in this as well. I thought this from looking at it from the outside. In the core of the building, there were still a lot of seats of fire the whole way down, realistically, the crews who had entered would have put them out before entering the other flats and it just didn't seem to be going out. I did hear a message going around saying that the gas was still not isolated.

I worked nine and a half hours of my first day off. Stuff hadn't sunk in yet. I'd even done the 3 Peaks Challenge a few days after Grenfell. I don't think factors kicked in until later. Grenfell was physically and mentally exhausting. You knew it was big but you didn't realise quite how huge it was until you started looking at social media. We are ok now but it took a while. It's changed everyone, there's no doubt about it and it will hit everybody at some stage.

It was a high-rise job that would be normal everyday bread and butter so to speak and just acted differently to what anybody would ever expect. The whole thing went beyond anyone's previous experience.

I would describe the impact on me as huge but at the end of the day we were doing our job and hopefully we won't have to do that again but it could happen again because there's other places that are still structurally built like this so we've got the learning experience behind it. I hope no one has to do that again.

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