

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: PIKE, JEANETTE

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

Occupation: FIRE FIGHTER

This statement (consisting of 4 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: J.PIKE

Date: 27/03/2018

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

This statement relates to my involvement with the Grenfell Tower fire, in London, in the early hours of the 14th June 2017.

I am a Control Operator for Merseyside Fire and Rescue, and have worked for the service for 28 years. I have performed the same role the whole time.

When I first joined, my initial training was a month long I believe. Back then, we had a lot more staff than we do now and we had a lot more senior staff within the premises whom we would shadow to learn how to do our roles properly. One-to-one learning with an individual officer for 4 weeks at a time then followed the month's basic training, and we rotated 4 times totalling 16 weeks. I sat with four different Watch Managers and looked at all aspects of the control room environment. The initial month training was to familiarise ourselves with ranks, stations, pneumonics and equipment that are used by the service – so of which is now defunct. I cannot remember if role-plays were used. It was also so long ago I can not remember specifics about the training.

Subsequently, I was asked which division I would like to work in within Merseyside. I chose my home area because I knew the roads and area a lot better than the rest of Merseyside. This was in the days when we did not have computers so were unable to look up addresses as easily as we can now.

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Signature witnessed by: DC.MATTL

When I first initially took calls, a sub officer sat with me (now a Watch Manager role) to ensure that I dealt with the call appropriately. The process has always been that once the call has been put through my the 999 operator we would first ask for the address of the caller, the district where they lived, the nearest main road and the type of incident. If it was a house fire they were reporting, I would ask where in the house the fire was located and where the caller was. I will then give the best advice depending on the circumstances. If a person cannot get out of gives any information to indicate that they are trapped, I will begin to give them Fire Survival Guidance.

Such advice would be to keep low, away from smoke, use blankets to block up doors and try to get to a window with fresh air. As per policy, I will always ask, "Can you get out, safely?" If they cannot – then the call becomes Fire Survival Guidance and I will stay on the phone.

There are policy changes dependent on the type of building. We may not get information from a caller who is panicking, for example, if they are in a flat the advice may differ from those in a house. Once we have inputted their address in to our system and created the incident type, we often get an alert on our screens about the address and we can be informed as to whether the property has a 'stay put' policy or not. On a separate system, there is call-handling guidance with additional information. We are also alerted as to the Pre-Determined Attendance for any given address. For example, at a house fire basic attendance is 2x appliances, a person reported trapped is a minimum of 3x appliances and a high rise 3x appliances with the addition of a Combined Platform Ladder (CPL). In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, our basic high-rise attendance is now 4 pumps, with CPL and a support pump. This would be for a confirmed Level 2 fire. A Level 1 would be a fire alarm or lift call.

Within our control room in Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, we will have a minimum of six staff on duty for a shift. The six staff will include a Watch Manager who is the overall supervisor of the control room, a Crew Manager, and the remaining staff are Control Operators. This can sometimes vary where we have two Watch Managers or Crew Managers. The Control Operators' main role is to answer and deal with emergency calls that come through. They also have other roles that includes National Resilience and administration duties. National Resilience is where the fire service will co-ordinate resources around the country during a major national incident. Administration duties can include checking the staffing rota, checking what officers are on duty, and any other office based work. We work on a four day shift pattern basis, working two day shifts (7am-7pm) and two night shifts (7pm-7am), which is followed by four days off.

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The 'stay put' policy is guidance that came in to effect for us between 5-10 years ago. Essentially, it is advice to tell people to remain in their homes and await rescue by fire crews. Personally, it is a policy that I am not overly comfortable with, because as a Control Operator I cannot see what they can, and therefore it can be hard to give the correct advice dependent on the situation. However, if the policy dictates that I give the 'stay put' advice – then I will give it. If a fire alarm sounds, residents may be advised to stay in their homes. This is based on compartmentation, I believe, as each flat is designed to be safe and sealed room. The compartment can resist fire for a certain period but I cannot remember how long.

I have taken Fire Survival Guidance calls but only within houses and never from high-rises.

We would take all calls relating to our own areas, then call the relevant Brigades via a direct line if it was outside of our area and pass on all relevant details for them to deal.

I have never had any previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017, I was working a night shift with White Watch. I began my shift at 1900 hours, and I was a Control Operator. My Watch Manager on the night was Pamela SEPHTON. I cannot remember many details of the beginning part of the shift, but it was not busy in Merseyside.

Just before my scheduled break, at approximately 2.50am we received a telephone call through our emergency line. I answered the phone and a BT Operator came through saying that she had a call from London and had been instructed to pass it through to Merseyside to answer, as London could not take it. I agreed to take the call and it was immediately put through. The caller was a youngish sounding male who sounded quite distressed on the phone. The caller said that there was a big fire where he was, and was told to ring up as his grandfather was stuck in the bathroom in his flat on the 11th or 14th floor. The caller gave me the address, which I did not recognise as being in Merseyside area and I had difficulty in understand the details he was giving me several times. After giving me the address, the caller said "he stopped talking to me. He needs evacuating so it's critical you get here", referencing to his grandfather. The caller was quite clear in what he was saying and offered me all the information that I would normally ask from a caller such as the address / telephone number / location / type of incident. As Control Operators, we do not take names from callers for data protection reasons as it would be shown on our incident logs. After obtaining all the information from the caller, the call ended.

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I immediately called London Fire Brigade control room via our direct phone line to pass them all the information I had obtained. I did not expect them to answer, but they did. I spoke to a female operator and passed all the details from the call I received including the address, floor number and details that a male was in the bathroom of a flat. The operator herself sounded upset and said to me that they were just telling people to go for it and get out of the building, and that they may not be able to get the male who I was passing details of.

I did not know how bad the fire was at that point. Our television in the control room is not routinely switched on unless there is an incident going on nationally that may require our assistance as National Resilience. It was only after the call with London that we switched on the television in our control room and watched Sky News who were reporting a live feed. It seemed like the top third of the building was engulfed in fire. It was 3am and hundreds of people inside the building would have been asleep when it happened. I have never seen anything like this, but recall seeing videos of various major fires across the world in our training. It was devastating to see.

After the call with London Fire Brigade, I do not recall anything else that happened during the remainder of my shift. Merseyside itself was quiet. We had no more involvement with the Grenfell Tower fire but was just watching it on Sky News from the control room. My Watch Manager, Pamela SEPHTON, called me into the office to check if I was ok after the call that I had taken.

I finished my shift at 0700 hours on the Wednesday as normal.

Post incident, there has been no further welfare assistance, apart from a further chat with Pamela. We do have a post incident procedure but it is generally for firefighters and immediately follows an incident. We have a CRIT – Critical Response Incident Team who work around the welfare side of things. Their procedures do involve control and is automatic for firefighting crews who attend a fatality, but may not be automatic for control room staff after an incident. I feel that we are overlooked for this post incident procedure.

After the initial news reported in the week after the fire, I have not read or viewed much to do with it. It is very upsetting to see and the scale of the fire is huge. I did often think whether that man on the 11th or 14th floor got out or not.

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