

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: SAMSON, MITCH

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

Occupation:

This statement (consisting of 5 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: MITCH SANSOM

Date: 06/02/2018

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

This statement refers to my account of events from the Grenfell Tower fire that took place on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

I am currently employed by the Kent Fire & Rescue Service. I joined in October 2013 in the role as a Control Room Operator. In December 2017, I was promoted to the role of Temporary Crew Manager within the control room.

On joining the Kent Fire & Rescue Service I had a five week recruits course where I learnt the basics of the fire service. This included learning the call signs / how to take a call / the setup of the control room / how to deal with certain types of incidents, amongst other topics that I cannot remember. During these five weeks we had three assessments that were both practical and theory based. Practical based assessments would include taking mock calls and transmitting radio messages. After the initial five weeks training we had a further five weeks of overlay shifts where we would work on different Watches and continued our learning on the job in a control room environment.

During my training I learnt about Fire Survival Guidance. Training around this began with listening to old calls where fire survival guidance was given by operators. Our trainer would then go through what we would ask the caller and why to help with our knowledge and understanding. Fire Survival Guidance is the advice call operators give to a caller who is trapped by fire. Our aim is to keep them safe until crews

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

arrive on scene. The advice given to callers can vary depending on the type of incident. The advice we give can include shutting doors / putting something at the bottom of the door to prevent fire coming through / putting damp cloths over faces / opening windows / keeping low / making themselves visible i.e. hang something out the window. Any information about the fire gathered will be fed through to our crews. A Control Operator would reassure the caller and stay on the phone. I have dealt with one previous Fire Survival Guidance call since I joined Kent Fire & Rescue Service.

When answering a 999 call, the first thing I would do as the Operator is take the caller's address and ask what the problem is. This means I can get the fire crews en- route to the incident as quickly as possible. Our system then creates a PreDetermined Attendance (PDA) based on what type of incident it is. The PDA will tell me how many appliances need to be sent to the incident, which I will mobilise as the operator. If the call is out of the ordinary and I get the sense that it requires more appliances, I can manually send another appliance.

With regards to the Fire Survival policy, it is advice given to a caller during a fire survival type incident where it is safer for the caller to stay where they are out of harm's way and to await rescue from crews. This is only if it is safer to do so. The Fire Survival Guidance policy applies to any property, from high-rise buildings to domestic houses.

In Kent Fire & Rescue Service, we sometimes take calls for other brigades, whether the caller is within the Kent area or if there is an overflow of calls. A Control Operator would take all the details from the caller and then contact the relevant brigade control room via telephone to hand over all the information collected, including incident number. We may also put a caller on hold and transfer the call to the relevant Brigade control room for them to continue. For the Grenfell Tower incident, I stayed on the phone to a caller whilst my colleague passed the information through to the London Fire Brigade.

The Kent Fire & Rescue Service control room is based within the Kent Police headquarters alongside the police control room. We work 12 hour shifts, either a 7am-7pm day shift, or 7pm-7am night shift. There are generally 3-5 staff members on duty during a shift. This includes the Watch Manager who is in charge of the control room, a Crew Manager who is second in charge, a Fire Operator who takes calls, and a Radio Operator who monitors and manages the radio channels.

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

I have no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower prior to the incident on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I began my night shift at 7pm. I was working the below people:

Watch Manager — Zoe MARTIN.

Crew Manager — Myself.

Radio Operator — Paul STABLES.

Fire calls Operator — Jade MILLSOM.

Zoe was in overall charge of the control room. My main roles as the Crew Manager was to monitor/assist our fire operator Jade, help Zoe with managing the room and to provide station ground cover across the brigade.

For the first couple of hours of our shift we were doing a training exercise alongside Kent Police. That ended at around 10pm. The next few hours in the control room were quiet, and we only had a few calls come in from local areas.

In the early hours of Wednesday, we received a telephone call from BT asking if we could take overflow calls from London who had a large incident taking place. I discussed with Zoe as to whether we could take these overflow calls, and we decided to contact our Duty Control Manager Linda Gill. I called Linda and told her that BT asked if we could take overflow calls saying that we were not too busy ourselves. Linda agreed that we could. After my call with Linda, I rang BT back and told them that we were able to take overflow calls from London. At the time I did not know what was happening in London, but expected a flurry of calls to come through.

No calls came through initially, so we looked up what was happening in London. We looked on BBC News and saw that a tower was on fire. The tower was surrounded by fire and looked as though it was a terrorist attack or scene from a movie.

Not long after I took my first call in relation to Grenfell Tower. The call was from a man who was

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

watching the fire on a Facebook live feed, but the caller was not in Grenfell Tower himself. He made the call assuming that we would send another appliance to the scene. I informed him that the London Fire Brigade were aware and were dealing with the fire before the call ended.

Around the same time Zoe took a call from a female in Kent who was calling on behalf of her husband, telling Zoe that he was in Grenfell Tower. I was aware that Zoe was dealing with this call, but do not know other information about it. Paul, our radio operator on the night, contacted London Fire Brigade control room and asked them what they wanted. The control room told us that they were taking details of the floor / flat / persons inside and asking the callers to leave the tower. They were not staying on the phones during fire survival calls due to the sheer volume of calls they were receiving. Paul then relayed this information to Zoe and I.

At 3am I answered my next call in relation to the fire. It was a call from a lady called 'Anne' who was on the 10th floor in flat 73 or 74. On initially answering the call, Anne said that she rang the fire brigade ten times and was told to leave her flat, but she couldn't as the fire was outside her front door. In a panicked voice, she said to me "Please don't hang up". I assured her I would not hang up the phone and stayed on the phone as I would with any fire survival guidance call. I began to ask Anne about the fire to gain information about it. She told me the fire was outside her front door but she had not yet made any attempt to get out. She was in her living room at the rear of the flat next to a window with her mum and two brothers. I started to give fire survival guidance to Anne which included opening the windows / closing the doors / putting cloths around the doors / staying low and putting damp cloths around their mouths. I kept going over the same advice again and again with Anne, reassuring her. Anne seemed to speak to the other people in the flat using a foreign language.

I do not know what language, but can assume she was passing on the information about my guidance. Anne was calm but did get emotional at times asking where the crews were and when they would be rescuing her. It wasn't our incident so couldn't say where they were, nor did I know. At one point I put Anne on hold and told my colleagues about the call as no one was monitoring me.

Usually, a Crew manager will monitor a call answered by another operator, but not on the night of Grenfell as I was sitting at the Crew Manager position. The information could then be passed onto

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

London Fire Brigade, all whilst I was still on the phone.

I did not realise how long the call was happening for until 52 minutes into the call. It was around this time in the call that I swapped names with Anne. She was telling me that brother was on the phone to another service who was advising them to get out of the flat. I knew they couldn't get out so I continued with giving my fire survival guidance.

I repeated the advice I was giving and continued to reassure Anne. I asked her if she could get out, and if so then to try as her brother was on the phone to another brigade telling them to do so — I assumed this was London Fire Brigade. She told me she was going to put her phone in her pocket and they were going to try and get out of the flat. The phone sounded like it went into a pocket as there was a bit of background noise and muffled shouts for a few seconds, before Anne came back onto the phone breathing heavily saying that they got fought back by the fire and couldn't leave. She could not then shut the front door because it was stuck open from the fire. As they could not shut the front door, I told Anne to go back to the living room in the flat and continued to give fire survival guidance telling her to cover her mouth, block doors and reassured her.

A few minutes later Anne told me she was going to try again to get out of the flat. She put her phone in her pocket but returned to the phone very quickly telling me that they got fought back again. The fire was too hot and intense for them to get out. By this time Anne was getting quite emotional and again asked me where the fire crews were. I didn't know where they were, but just continued to reassure her and told her to stay safe.

All of a sudden Anne said "I think there is someone there". She told me she was putting her phone in her pocket again and I heard background noises again for a number of minutes. I knew when the phone was in her pocket as the background noises and shouts were very similar each time she did it. I heard very faint voices and shouting, but it was all mumbled with the phone being in the pocket. After a few minutes I heard Paramedics in the background saying "Take this and go there", and other voices that sounded like fire crews or emergency crews. Anne came back to the phone telling me they were all out of the tower, all safe/alive and said thank you to me. The call then ended. It was only afterwards that I realised the call was an hour and half long.

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL

I remember having the BBC news channel on in front of me when Anne first called, but I minimised the screen during the call. I did not want to be distracted by looking at the tower, counting floors. If I looked at it, I knew my attention would have been drawn to that and away from the phone call with Anne which was my priority at that time.

When the call ended, I noticed that our Duty Group Manager Chris Else was in the control room. He must have come into control whilst I was on the phone. He took me out of the room and asked if I was Ok, conducting a welfare check. By this point, I felt numb and was mentally exhausted with the call being over an hour long. After the short chat with Chris, I returned to the control room. The time was around 5-5.30am, and it was only around an hour of my shift left and we received no more calls relating to Grenfell Tower. I took a short break, and then finished my shift at 7am. I only took two calls relating to the Grenfell fire.

All of our decisions and the information received is logged on our systems as we are on the phone to the caller. Since the Grenfell incident, I have tried not to think about it, but it was very hard for the next couple of weeks with there being coverage over the news and social media.

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL

Statement of: SAMSON, MITCH

OFFICIAL

Form MG11(T)

Page 7 of 7

Signature: Mitch SANSOM
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL