

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: CHISHOLM, NEIL

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

Occupation: FIREFIGHTER

This statement (consisting of 3 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: NEIL CHISHOLM

Date: 25/10/2017

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

I have been asked to make a statement in relation to my involvement with the Grenfell Tower fire on 14th June 2017. This statement I made with DC Katie Bennett and DC Lou Jones. I have also given them a map with my route to the tower on it. I understand this map is my exhibit and has exhibit reference NAC/1. At the end of my shift at Grenfell Tower I took a photograph of the building. I have sent this to the police image appeal website but this will be exhibit reference NAC/2.

I have been in the London Fire Brigade since I joined in May 1991. Initially I was a front line fire-fighter and moved to Bromley Fire Station in 1995 again working as a front line fire-fighter. I then went to Plumstead Fire Station as the same position. I was then promoted to Crew Manager (CM) at Woolwich Fire Station and from there I was promoted to Sub officer at Peckham. I then became a Watch Manager B (WMB) in fire fighter development and moved as a WMB onto the Leadership and Management development team. I was then a temporary Station Manager (SM) at Battersea, temporary SM at Downham, temporary SM at New Malden and then SM at Southwark. I later moved to Dockhead as a SM and then Plumstead. I then became a Group Manager (GM) at Ealing Fire Station as the Borough Commander and finally I moved sideways to become the Borough Commander at Southwark where I have remained since June 2017.

On Wednesday 1 4th June 2017, the day of the Grenfell Tower fire, I was off duty. I was watching the fire unfold on the news. I had my pagers with me and knew if I was required at the scene I would be contacted. I went into work at Old Kent Road as normal at 8am. The duty system we have would have shown me automatically on duty from this time so I didn't need to book on with anyone. I put the TV on

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2017

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again and continued to watch the fire. I thought it was utterly bizarre what I was watching. I had never seen anything like that before. It was all a bit surreal really. I knew that Control at the incident would be extremely busy so I waited to be contacted. At 11am I received a pager message requesting immediate relief at Grenfell Tower. I called control and booked on status 2. I then went on blue lights in my fire vehicle directly to the scene. This was quite a long drive from Old Kent Road. When I arrived between 12pm-1pm, I went to the RVP where there was a Command Unit (CU) set up. However when I went there it was unmanned. I looked at the building and there was actually not much in the way of flames. There was quite a bit of light grey smoke but that was it. I met up with Group Manager (GM) Martin Wilson from Hillingdon. He told me where the CU was that I needed, so I went there but it was a good fifteen minute walk away. GM Wilson had forgotten his radio so was going back to his car to get it.

When I got to the CU I met with Assistant Commissioner (AC) Andy Roe. He gave me a brief and asked me to go to Command Unit Support and see DAC Lee Drawbridge, which I did. DAC Drawbridge stated he didn't need anything but GM Steve Norman needed relieving. His role had been organising resources to and from the scene but he didn't want relieving either. He informed me that GM John Graham on the bridgehead (BH) may need relieving. Communications on the radio were difficult at the time. I got to the base of Grenfell Tower and met Police with the riot shields. They told me if I needed to get across I would have to go under the shield. I did this and entered the tower. It took me about 45 minutes to the tower from the CU.

I think the BH was on the second or fourth floor. GM Graham was present as was GM Tim Frost, who I later found out was the search co-ordinator. I noticed on my way up to the BH that there was lots of water coming down the stairs and lots of hose lines in the stairwell. There was also lots of debris such as fallen windows at the base of the building. Inside the tower however was clear. There were two holding areas for fire crews. One of which GM Norman was the Commander for at the leisure centre, and Martin Wilson was managing the BA crews outside Grenfell Tower.

The BH appeared quite organised. They had separate rooms in the flats for briefings, debriefings, extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA) and standard duration breathing apparatus (SDBA). There were also two information boards set up. SM Dan Alley was taking the debriefs from fire-fighters who had been up fighting fires or carrying out rescues. SM Reid was also on the BH and I utilised him to do little jobs, such as going to the fourth floor to see how it was doing.

The handover from GM Graham was not procedural. It was very busy and I said I would watch him to see how it was being run. I did this for about ten minutes when I then told GM Graham he was relieved and I

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2017

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took over the BH. He looked shattered. I tried to inform Control that I was now in charge of the BH on channel 1 but I wasn't sure whether the message was received. For this reason I also asked GM Graham to inform Control. My objective was to try to get the BH moved up to the ninth floor. I achieved this objective and I believe it was either the sixth or ninth floor we reached. We passed the bariatric casualty on the stairs, who was covered in a sheet at the time. So whatever floor the bariatric casualty was on, we had gone passed that. I think it would have been on the 6th or 7th floor. We only managed to move the BH once. It was difficult because we needed to be high enough to progress up the building but low enough for the air to be clear. Control were informed that the BH had moved higher in the tower.

I noted on the way up that there were still small fires in the flats. These were being sustained by the gas supply. The stairwell did not have clean air in it but there was enough air. All the flat windows had gone and the flats were effectively open so this provided some cleaner air. I didn't go into any of the flats because GM Julian Spooner had earlier handed me a handwritten briefing which stated not to go into the flats and stay in the core of the building due to the stability of it. I think the emergency lighting had gone as well. I am sure we needed lighting in the BH because it was quite dark. We set the BH up in the same manner as it had been on the 2nd or 4th floor. I think the BH was moved within about 30 minutes of me arriving. I had two priorities; the first was to keep going higher with the hoses using SDBA crews to fight fires. The second was using EDBA crews for the longer task of getting information on the locations and numbers of people as they moved further and further up the tower.

GM Spooner was in charge of safety and he had spoken with a Dangerous Structural Engineer who had attended the scene and carried out an assessment. The building was stable for the time being. I continued to send crews up to fight fires and carry out rescues. They would then come down having completed that but they were not getting high enough up the building. The issue at the time was that we couldn't get the fire-fighting media higher up there. I think the 6th floor was the highest we got that to. There were places for the fire-fighters to plug into but it just hadn't been done yet. There was not enough hose up there. The fire-fighters couldn't fight the fires completely due to them being fed by the gas supply as I said earlier. I kept asking for the gas to be turned off via the radio.

At some point GM Tim Frost was relieved. SM Dan Alley was also relieved but SM David Reid stayed to the end. SM John Ryan and SM David George arrived at the BH at various points. My timings are a bit hazy. Despite the fires still smouldering and gas pipes being alight we kept trying to move higher up the building. All information being received by SM Dan Alley regarding casualties was being recorded on the High Rise Information Boards. SM David Reid was keeping an eye on the floors below us because they

Signature: Neil CHISHOLM
2017

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were still alight. I got a report back that we couldn't get water on one particular floor. I believe this was the 12th floor. I didn't know at the time what the reasons were but all I wanted was a solution to getting water up there. I requested a Lightweight Portable Pump (LPP). SM David George was the Bulk Media Advisor (BMA) and he came to assist as he was the water specialist.

After a period of time SM George came back to me with reasons for the lack of water but this was about the same time as I had made the decision to withdraw from the building. This was at about 4pm when I had a time out moment to reflect on everything we were doing, everything we were achieving and everything we couldn't achieve. For example, we couldn't extinguish all the fires because we couldn't get the gas supply turned off, we had no water on the higher floors, all the rescues that could be done had been done and the building's stability was a risk. We were not achieving our objectives. I had already received reports from crews of concrete spalling and cracks appearing.

I informed DAC Rick Ogden who was the Operations Commander of my decision to withdraw. I explained this would be done in two stages. Firstly, to go move the BH back down to the second floor and then out completely. DAC Ogden was not happy with this decision so he and GM John Simpson from the Operational Review Team came to the BH. We had a private discussion about the plan in one of the bedrooms of a flat. I explained about the cracks appearing and the noises of the steel rods expanding and retracting. DAC Ogden, GM Simpson and SM George went to examine the cracks for themselves. I began to make moves to move the BH. A few minutes later they all came down at high speed calling an emergency evacuation. I can't be 100% sure but I believe they used their emergency whistles.

I made sure every floor was clear of fire-fighters and fire-investigators. We were all out in about 5 minutes. We had to leave the equipment where it was but I believe we took the casualty information boards. We left the tower the same way I had come in. The BA holding area been cleared and the appliance which had been feeding the dry riser main was no longer manned.

DAC Ogden, GM Simpson and I all went to the CU by the leisure centre where AC Dominic Ellis was. He was informed about the withdrawal and the reasons for it. I believe Sergeant Hutchins from the Police was talking to AC Ellis about when he could get into the tower. DAC Ogden gave an overview of what happened. After the withdrawal the fire brigade were not going to be actively fighting the fires anymore. We needed to support the police in them doing their searches.

I think I was inside Grenfell on the BH for approximately 2 hours. The only casualties I came across was

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2017

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the bariatric patient in the stairwell. Due to the fact we had ceased firefighting I left the scene. There was no need for me to be relieved because we had gone from offensive mode to defensive mode. I left about 5pm. I believe I went off duty and home. I did not make any notes.

I did not have any interaction with any members of public other than a lady offering me a cup of tea which I politely declined. I did not wear a body camera or have any thermal image cameras. I did not notice anything about the flat doors or fire doors. I cannot say I noticed anything about the fire spread either. I do not know if the tower had a central alarm system, or whether any alarms had sounded. There was nothing of note about the smell of the smoke. A lot of this had all happened prior to my arrival.

With regards the smoke extraction fan in Grenfell Tower I think I did ask someone about it but I'm sure they said it wasn't working. The firefighting lift was not used while we were there but I am not sure why this was. I have never been to Grenfell Tower before, nor do I have any knowledge about it. The stay put policy decisions had all been made prior to my arrival and I had no involvement in that. But it is standard policy in high rise fires for the residents to remain in their compartments. All I can say about the fire was the whole incident was unprecedented. By the time I left Grenfell Tower it was just a blackened hull. This is when I took the photograph on my phone.

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