

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: CRAIG, PAULA

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

Occupation: TEAM LEADER OPERATOR

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: PAULA CRAIG

Date: 26/11/2017

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

This statement is made in relation to the Grenfell Tower Fire on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

This interview was audio recorded on the 26th November 2017 and took place at North West Fire Control. Present during this interview was DC Emma HARRIS and DC David PEARL working on the Grenfell Fire investigation. Also present were Sheri KITSON FBU Rep from North West Fire Control Branch and Paula PARKES an Operations Manager also from North West Fire Control.

I will use terminology throughout this statement that relates to my role within the Fire Service. I will explain the terminology I will be using when I make reference to it in my statement.

I have worked as a team leader at North West Fire Control for three (3) and half-years when we moved over to Lingley Mere Business Park, Lingley Green Avenue, Great Sankey, Warrington, WA5 3UZ. I joined Manchester Fire Service in October 1983 and joined recruiting as an admin clerk and worked in there for five (5) years. An opportunity became available for me to work as a Control Room Operator (CRO) in 1988. I then went up to Watch Manager and then the merger took place so I made a decision that I wanted to join North West Fire Control. I applied for the role of Operation Manager but wasn't successful, but I was offered the role of a Team Leader so I accepted it.

Team Leaders are attached to teams, there are three (3) of us on Team 3 and we have four (4) teams in the control room. I oversee the daily activities, ensuring all the tasks are carried out, oversee the development

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and training of my staff, basically looking after my team. We have twelve (12) staff on a team, this is made up of three (3) team leaders but you only ever need two (2) to be on duty at a time and the other nine (9) are made up of CRO's. I supervise a number of people but due to variable staffing these levels vary. There are eight (8) on duty in the morning, at midday there are eleven (11), at 7pm we have ten (10) on duty and on the night shift we have seven (7) on from 10pm to 7am. I tend to supervise my own team but due to the mid-shift there are staff from other teams that I supervise as well. I didn't initially enjoy the job because it was so different, but I do enjoy it now but it has taken a little while.

Prior to joining North West Fire Control, I was a Watch Manger in Manchester Fire Service and it was basically the same role as I am in. I supervised a team, I had thirteen (13) staff on the team in Manchester and I was in charge of them on a day to day basis and I was actually attached to a watch, but basically I was performing the same role. I started as a CRO as everyone starts as a CRO when they join the fire service. I was in the role of a CRO for ten (10) years, there role is to handle all the main functions of a control room. They answer the 999 calls, they mobilise appliances, they answer the radio messages, actioning radio messages, deal with requests, they deal with the admin calls and queries, so they perform the main role and as team leaders we oversee them. They also deal with training at stations that are ongoing, dealing with any exercises so they do the basic day to day activities that go on in a control room.

In the control room here we have three (3) pods, but when we first came over we were going to be working as four (4) brigades but unfortunately it didn't work out. The mobilising desk is situated at the back and has space for three (3) positions, to the right of those desks is the pod that covers Cheshire & Cumbria, to the left which is Lancashire, the pod in the middle is Greater Manchester and each pod is covered at all times. We as team leaders have monitoring facilities and we can see the staff at all times. To me the issue is that the room is too big, the staff are too far away from you unfortunately, because we have come from smaller compact control rooms. At Manchester we had a big control room but it felt closer together and you could communicate easily with the staff. Here if I am at my desk the Manchester desk is a good distance away so you can't always hear what is going on but it is something that is being addressed and being looked at and they are trying to resolve the problem. The pods to the left & right are close to you, but we do have an intercom facility to communicate with the Manchester pod, so if they are on a call and you have to assist them there is a button on the team leader computers called intervene which we can use to talk to them in their ear, but personally I wouldn't do that because I wouldn't want it done to me. You can always hear the CRO's on their calls but if you hear them struggling, or if they put

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their hand up or if they request assistance you will log onto the call and monitor it. If there are two (2) team leaders one (1) would go over to the CRO, while the other would monitor the call and assist them with the call. So if they are struggling to find an address, the one (1) monitoring would be able to assist them so we have the facility to assist them but we don't listen to every single call that comes into the control room. There are a lot of CRO's on our team with experience but if they are struggling they would ask for assistance.

The computer system that we use is called 'Intergraph', we also have an 'ICCS' screen and it is integrated with the command system, so if you access a line on the 'ICCS', if it is a new incident it will generate and put all the new details onto the system in the middle. It relays information like the caller identification or if it is a mobile it will give you the co-ordinates and give you a map of roughly where it is and this will help you in identifying where the caller is. The CRO will then input all the details, the address, nature of incident and any additional information. If the address is correct the system will validate it and you get a little tick that tells the CRO it is a validated address. You can also zoom into the map should the CRO require further information. The CRO then presses a button this is called a proposed resources button and it will tell them how many appliances are required and they will mobilise them to the incident. There is also a line at the top which is a features line and radio traffic come through that. The CRO will get an alert button and this will tell them a request has been made to speak to them. The CRO's will accept that and type in a message on the log. On their right hand side is an admin desktop, so as team leaders we can view other CRO's desktop, so that's where the CRO's would do all their admin work. It used to be FIM Fire Incident Management now it is ICAD Incident and Dispatch. It is a system that use to mobilise.

Every incident has a PDA (Pre-Determined Attendance) report, this is computerised and it's a matrix that merges to give you a pre-determined attendance report for that type of incident combined with that address. An example of this if there was a car fire at Manchester Airport it would give you a different pre-determined attendance if it was a car fire on a road. So when all the details are put into the system it gives you the predetermined attendance report so when you view the proposed resources it tells you what it is suggesting for you to send to the incident. There is a button that you we can use to override the system but we very rarely do that. We have something called relief, so if we had a protracted incident like Grenfell Tower we could have a relief crew ordered for nine (9) o'clock and this would be in their notes, so if this came up in the PDA as the best available option and the next appliance if a further thirty (30)

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seconds away, we could override it because we would know that the crews had been at an incident for over five (5) hours. It's not something that we do regularly but it's an option that is available to us. Another example is if you are getting a lot of calls to a building fire, you can increase the PDA while they are on route as long as you tell the appliances attending that we are sending additional appliances because of the amount of calls we are receiving so we do have that discretion. The CRO's would very rarely do it off their own accord, they would usually consult the team leader and give them their reasons as to why they think this should be done. The CRO's have a button on their systems that allows them to use should they need assistance. Once they press this button it flashes up on the team leaders screen 'ICCS' to make them aware that assistance is required. The new operators that we have use it more as they have been taught this on their training courses.

FSG calls - Fire Survival Guidance calls. As soon as a caller tells the CRO's that they are trapped and cannot get out it becomes an FSG call. We have emergency call handling prompts and they assist the CRO's in certain emergency calls, it provides you with advice and tells you what questions should be asked. We have it for car fires and bonfires now, questions like have you seen youths in the area, is it a known trouble spot, so we have the pre mobilisation stage, the stage after mobilisation and the continuation of questions to the caller. The aim of the CRO is to get people out of a building if they are trapped, if they have told the CRO that they cannot get out, the CRO would first mobilise units to the incident, the CRO would then talk to the caller and provide them with advice on how to stay safe, get yourself as far away from the fire as you can, make sure all the doors are shut, place bedding down by the doors to stop the smoke from coming into the room, get down as low as you can, if it's safe to open the window, open it and get some air in, put something out of the window to alert the fire crews in identifying where you are. But the main aim of the CRO's is to try and get them out if they can. The last FSG call that I dealt with was about twelve (12) months ago, because as team leaders we rarely take calls. In Manchester over the years I have dealt with a lot of FSG calls but not here at North West Fire Control. The FSG call that I dealt with, the initial call was from the girl's dad and then she called in and was hysterical, so I stayed on the line as she was in a terrible state. If I had come off the line to her she would have put herself in danger, so the CRO's would have to assess each call and then deal with it. If you can calm them down and put them in a safe position where they have a chance of being rescued you would do it. We ask people their names in situations like this and we are trained to do this, you try and build up a sort of bond, relationship with the caller and you give them your name as well. In my opinion I think it helps an example of this was call we had a call in Manchester on Boxing day and it was awful, so we

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went to a debrief later and the lady involved was present and she knew all our names, so it's obviously had an impact on her.

When I joined in Manchester we had a seven (7) week training course where you learnt the basics of the job, you then went onto a watch and spent five (5) weeks there, so you had to spend three (3) months before you were actually counted as an operator, you were an extra prior to that. Over the years I have been on a number of training courses, step up management courses, continuation courses, progression courses and you had your basic on watch training. We had a training guide where you had to do many things over the course of the year. I think we did emergency call training twice a year. The majority of staff that we had then were very experienced, so when most of us came over here to North West Fire Control we had a two (2) week training course, the system we were going to use wasn't properly set up so we had a few issues. We started on the 28th May 2014 although the system had gone live prior to that with the other brigades, so basically we had paper training records. But to be honest I don't think we have got training right here yet. We now have refresher training and that commenced this year for the first time and it is already programmed in for next year. We haven't had emergency call handling training over here, but we have got the prompts that we do go through collectively on team. We do have a system now called PDR Pro, it's a system that's on the computer and we have various sections that we have to complete each month and when it is completed it goes to green, so we do have set things that we have to do each month but this is a new thing and it started in April this year. We got training for the system but as the system wasn't working so the training we had wasn't right. But for the first year we didn't have any training and it wasn't a deterrent to anyone it's because we had a new system and we were learning, but since then we have started to put things in place and now we have certain activities that have to be completed like evacuation for Warwickshire, Northants, London because we are London's overspill as they are with us so we have a training pack and it has to be done on a yearly basis.

Refresher training is once a year and it took place this year in January/February and it's been scheduled for next year again. Because the system is being developed all the time, we actually suggest what topics we want, so motorways is a real bug bear and we all struggle with it so we've asked for it to be included next year. So it's really things that we want assistance with that we are suggesting and it is continual because the system is updating all the time. We don't have any training in relation to emergency calls. The new recruits have it on their training course so when we are dealing with them we do go through things and CRO's are told to sit and read the call prompts when they are not busy, so even though we

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have no structural training we are refreshing our knowledge. I am aware of the 'stay put policy' from Manchester rather than here so I do not what it means. In blocks of flats if there is a fire on a different floor and because of fire proof doors it is safer for them to stay in their contained area rather than sending them out. I don't recall having any training around the 'Stay put policy' in North West Fire Control I have brought what I know with me. I don't know if the new recruits have had any training around this and I don't know if it is part of their training course.

We are a backup control centre for West Midlands & Stafford, Warwickshire, Northampton, London and Merseyside now. So if they get an overspill of calls they will come through to us or if they have to evacuate to their standby control. Our standby control centre is in Stretford so it could take us as long as two (2) hours to get there so they would take our calls as we would take their calls, so we have a buddy agreement. There wasn't an agreement when we came over, so it happened sometime afterwards, West Midlands & Stafford were first, then Warwickshire, Northampton, London and now Merseyside who have come in very recently. I am only aware of the Grenfell Tower but on the 14th during the day we received a few calls from London as they were moving to their secondary control room. If we had to evacuate from this place, we would contact British Telecom and tell them so they would divert all our calls to whatever brigade. If it was just an overspill of calls, they would just go through, they must have a certain amount of time BT and if they hadn't had an answer they will then redirect them. During the floods the other year, we got a lot of calls from West Midlands, even though we had a lot of calls ourselves, we were getting their overspill of calls because they couldn't physically answer them. So if we know we had to go we would tell BT, but if we had to go suddenly and hadn't informed them it's something that would automatically happen as they wouldn't be getting answers from here so they would redirect them to whoever was the next one in line. If we get very busy we would ring BT as we have a number and we would tell them that we were really busy with flooding calls. BT in fact ring us and tell us that we have calls waiting to be answered and any emergency calls can be put through to a standalone phone which is a completely independent number. On the night of Grenfell Fire BT rung us and told us that they were getting a lot of calls for an incident in London and was it okay to start putting them through to North West Fire Control so BT made that call so it wasn't down to us.

CRO Helen OULTAN answered the phone to BT that morning, she came over to the team leaders desk and said that she had taken a call from BT, she said that London was dealing with a big incident and BT were getting a lot of calls and asked if we would we be able to take some, so BT have asked us before

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they put any calls through. I think it was between 01:00 and 01:10 hours on the morning of the 14th June 2017 I was made aware that something was going on in London. Few of the CRO's were on their breaks so were called them back as we didn't know what to expect. My fellow team leader Natalie phoned the Operations Manager Ged BASSON and told him what we had been told by BT, we didn't know what it related to but this was the situation. He said that he would have a look and came in straightaway. We did try and ring London but we didn't know that we had an alternative number because they were at their stand by secondary control room. To be honest I only let the phone ring for a few seconds as I thought if they were busy so we would wait and see. I rang the London control number that we had but because they were on standby they had given the day watch an alternative number which we then realised was written on a board in the control room. On our Intergrated system we have numbers already in the system, a direct dial number so all I have to do is press the button and it will dial through to the London Control room.

The first (1) call came in at 01:36 hours so it was a good 20 to 25 minutes before we got a call and the they started to come in more frequently. We still didn't know what was going on in London. I answered two (2) calls, the first (1) one was an abandoned call, it was for the fire in London but the fire service was already there. I called the caller back and they confirmed that the call was in relation to Grenfell Tower Fire, they were outside and the fire service was there. I then took another abandoned call that said that there was a big fire in London. I tried to ring that mobile back but couldn't get through. The CRO's started to take calls and were giving FSG advice to the callers, so I rang the alternative number that I had and got through to London and spoke to Alex. I was liaising with her, I told her what we had so far, she told me about the incident and the number of pumps that had been assigned and told me it was a huge fire. I told her that we would take the incidents, policy states that if we take an incident and we then put it through to them. Any calls related to Grenfell we will take the information and close it, any calls that we receive with people involved and if there were any children, we would contact them and give them the details, flat number, floor number and the number of people involved or any incident other than Grenfell Tower we would ring them, so that was the agreement we had with London. So once the CRO's started to get calls were people were trapped, I was ringing her and giving her the details and passing this information through. I first contacted Alex at around 01:45 hours, she was the officer in charge in London, she told me it was large fire, it was a block of flats and that there were twenty (20) pumps dealing with the fire. They were getting inundated with calls, lots of calls and they did have a lot of fire engines there that's all she could say. She sounded calm, very level headed and said this was the situation we were in, so that's when we made the agreement that we would only phone them if there were people

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trapped, where they were, additional calls and everything else would be just logged, closed and dealt with afterwards. So we were entering the incident onto our system, if people were saying that they were outside we can see the flats, we were entering them in as there is a facility in the system where we can put town London and it would just validate it as the centre of London, so we were typing that into the address field so we could get a validation because we don't have London's data addresses in our system and then typing all the additional information on like the address, the flat, everything else. So if it was just someone outside saying I can see a flat on fire in Grenfell, we were just entering Grenfell Towers, flat on fire caller outside fire service in attendance and closing it off. Whereas the ones with people trapped we kept the lines open, the incident was open and we were relaying the information to London, with details of the number of people trapped in each flat. On the system we have various tabs active, pending and closed. We try to close the pending tab because the CRO's tend to think that units have not been mobilised, so we set a queue up for the Grenfell Fire calls, we would just close the incident down so that it was not displaying to us but it's still there with all the details and when it did calm down later we did copy them all and sent them to London. It was the calls were we knew that the people were not in any danger. I was listening into the calls and as I was getting information I was making notes, I was also looking at the CRO's and what they were typing on the logs and then I was ringing Alex and passing this information onto her. I didn't know if that line was left free just for us because every time I rang her I got through straightaway and I would tell her that we had a CRO on the line for ten (10) minutes and there was this amount of people in that flat saying that they couldn't get out because of the smoke and we were giving them advice. My fellow team leader took a call and told them to phone back if they were in any more danger so we passed that information over to them as well. At one point I told her that we had four (4) CRO's giving FSG advice so if we got any of our own calls we would have to come off the line, we would have to say to them to stay safe but if you need to ring back please do. I was concerned as we still had our own work to do and I didn't want all the CRO's to be on the phone dealing with FSG calls. We only told people to stay in if they told us that they couldn't get out.

I have a monitoring facility on my screen that allows me to click onto a CRO's name and this allows me to go in and monitor. I was listening to various calls via a head piece, so Natalie and myself were either listening to the calls or going and standing next to the CRO's and monitoring the call they were dealing with and to also see if we could offer any assistance. Everyone in the control room was bewildered by now and I wanted to make sure the CRO's were all okay. When I passed this information over to Alex I could hear her in the background passing the information onto the fire ground. All the information that we

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were taking were put onto the logs on the system. I must have called Alex about 7 to 8 times, mainly because CRO Aisha had to deal with a difficult call, so we were continuously passing over information about that call. I think that the person Aisha was speaking to went unconscious while she was on the phone. The last call that I made to Alex was about 02:15 hours when the decision was changed from 'stay put' to get out'. Alex didn't tell me who had made that decision but I assumed it was made from fire ground. Prior to this we were giving the callers FSG guidance as I assume they were doing in London as well as I had phoned Alex about a call that Susan PIMBLETT was dealing with as there was concern for the man and his wife and didn't know what advice to give them as they wanted to get out but we were telling them to stay, that's when she said they've made a decision and changed from 'stay put' to 'get out' and she told me to tell the man and his wife to get a wet towel put it over their heads and tell them to go. I think we dealt with nineteen (19) calls in total that morning, so I was just updating her about the nineteen (19) calls. So after the advice had changed from 'stay put' to 'get out' we didn't receive any more calls.

By this time the duty Operation Manager for the night Ged BASSON had arrived at about 02:05 hours and he changed the TV channel over to Sky News and the radio went on and by now we knew it had gone to forty (40) pumps and we heard the request for extra aerals. In my opinion that change to 'get out' was the worst bit because we were watching the fire go up the building on TV and we were convinced that we were sending people to their deaths, we were absolutely convinced that was what we were doing. We knew that with some of the calls the people were rescued but with the others we didn't know at all. When I saw the pictures on Sky News it was horrendous I have never seen anything like that in my life. I felt awful but I kept thinking about the CRO's in London and the fire fighters, I couldn't comprehend what they were dealing with, I couldn't put anything into perspective at all.

There is a radio in the back of the control room and it can monitor other brigades, it has police sharing groups so it has a facility to monitor, so Ged put it straight onto London. I wouldn't have thought about changing the radio channel it wouldn't have crossed my mind to do that. There was a lot of messages about getting aerals which is a tall fire engine with a big ladder but we were just hearing little snippets of what was happening, apart from make pumps forty (40) but by that time we knew how bad it was as were watching it unfold in from of our eyes on TV. It wasn't the radio channel that they were using in the control room. A pump is another term used for an appliance and they are also referred to as fire engines. When we were not busy we googled Grenfell Tower and brought the flats up on the Internet just to see what they looked like and I know Sam found an article via his phone about the block of flats and I think it

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read something like it was an accident waiting to happen so we sort of became obsessed with it. We all sat there talking to each other and were gobsmacked as we couldn't believe that something like that could happen in a country like ours in this day and age.

Everyone was just shocked and sat quietly in the control room, we were relieved as we knew that CRO Helens family had got out as she could hear the firemen in the background talking to her and getting her out. We thought that we had sent Sue PIMBLETT'S husband and wife to their death as we were convinced of that and it wasn't looking good for the lady and people in the flat at the top of the tower that Aisha was talking to. We were all just shocked as none of the team had experienced anything like that before. I phoned London at six (6) o'clock in the morning and spoke to Alex as we thought things may have calmed down and we wanted them to know that we were thinking about them and to see if they were alright, so it was kind of a welfare call to them. I think Alex was like all of us in shock, she did say that other staff had come in to assist and she said that she had never experienced anything like that before. She also told me that some of her staff were very upset but she seemed very level headed but was upset herself.

We are allowed to bring in our mobiles as long as we use them out of normal working hours, we have internet on the computers but we are only allowed to look at the news as long as it is work related, so anything work related is okay. I myself personally used the internet to bring up the block of flats, as I was shocked and they seemed like upmarket sort of flats and you don't expect something like that to happen. I think the team just wanted to go home so we handed over to the oncoming team and finished our shift at 07:00 hours and went home. The next day I received a call from Janine CARDIN who was also an Operations Manager and she wanted to know if I was okay and she said that she was offering TRIM Trauma Incident Management and should she ring and speak to the team. I made a decision straightaway and told her no I think it is too soon. I think Helen OUTLON had set up a group with all of us in it, so I told her that as I was in contact with everyone I would message them all, so on 14th June 2017 at 17:36 I emailed everyone, 'Hi, Janine has just phoned and checking to see if we are all okay. They want us to know that if we wanted to utilise the TRIM service that was now available. I have said that I think we are okay but the facility is available so should you want to contact Janine or myself, fantastic job done by all of us'. I got responses of the majority of the team to say they were okay but I didn't get a response from Aisha, so I sent a message to Janine telling her that everyone was okay but I was concerned about Aisha as she had not responded, because the call that she took was very disturbing [REDACTED]

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Eventually I did get a call from Aisha to say that she was okay at the moment so I relayed this to Janine. So I personally made the decision and that's why they didn't receive any personal calls from the management because I thought it was too soon, perhaps some of them may have appreciated the call from Janine. Sarah WILSON is our Senior Operations Manager but we were not contacted by her. I would like to add that on our teams first shift back after the incident, my fellow team leader Natalie was carrying out a watch briefing session and several operators were still upset by the incident. We immediately arranged a debrief session for the following shift which was the 19th June. Aisha was off duty and Sue PIMBLETT who was on a different team were both invited. We carried out the debrief which all staff felt was beneficial.

We do have a fall back system, we have fall back books these are called the parish mobilising books for London, every area in London is listed but not by post codes, but we would use google to search for post codes. Every call that we were getting was the same so we knew that they were from London so I would look in the parish book and know where the nearest appliance was to Kensington the location of Grenfell Tower, so we would be able to mobilise them with the help of fall back phones and things like that. On our system we mobilise to the exact address but from the parish books we would mobilise them to the nearest parish. Had we got an incident from London that we had to mobilise to we would have used the parish books.

Since Grenfell are you aware of any changes that have been made in the day to day running of the control room. We have now got a high rise call prompt to assist a list of questions to ask but to be honest Grenfell Tower wasn't a normal incident so a call prompt wouldn't have assisted on that night. I have read the questions and I don't think they are appropriate questions to ask. A number of call prompts that we have are for the crews safety as they get attacked a lot so I haven't noticed other changes apart from the prompts for high rise buildings. A high rise building is a building with over 5 floors. This is where the system helps us with the address and the PDA matrix because they merge together and at the bottom of the screen it will say high rise building and it is a different attendance altogether for a high rise building to a normal building.

On the 16th June 2017, I was working for Sue PIMBLETT that day so took a call from Alex and this is the feedback she gave me. I hope everyone is okay, I am grateful for your assistance on the day. The staff are obviously upset but are getting by and they took 354 calls that morning and eleven (11) staff were on duty, emergency call handling was given to the callers were the total occupancy was 171 . We definitely

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know that 65 of these were rescued I know it's not everyone but the advice from control rooms directed the fire fighters to these people. So I think that was very nice of her under the circumstances to do that. So we sorted out a whip and sent them a chocolate hamper just to let them know we were thinking about them.

We really wanted to know as a team what happened to the people we had spoken to that morning, we knew that the person Aisha had been speaking to had died unfortunately, because of the description and she was on the TV quite soon afterwards. We knew that Helen's family had got out and we were all convinced that we had sent Sue's caller Sena and his wife to their deaths. I spoke to Alex the other week because we have kept in touch and she provided me with a number of a contact in London someone in the fire service, to see if they had survived, so if we knew that flat number and the names of the people they would help us. So I contacted them a couple of weeks ago and found out that they had survived and that was really good news. We here in North West Fire Control did not know that that service was available, it was only while I was talking to Alex when she told me that there was a department that may be able to assist us. Ged BASSON called them and they gave him the good news about Sena and his wife. I don't know what the reaction of the team would have been if we had been told that they had died in the fire, but I am really pleased that I found out about them.

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