

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: MCSHEE, RICHARD

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 6 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: RICHARD MCSHEE

Date: 02/03/2018

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

This statement has been prepared from the verbal account I provided to Detective Constable Luis CASTANHERIA and Detective Constable Roxanne DAWE on Monday 29th January 2018 at WANDSWORTH fire station. Also present was my Fire Union Representative Steve WRIGHT.

It will detail my actions as a CREW MANAGER at GRENFELL TOWER FIRE from 13th - June 14th June 2017. In this statement I will mention my role and duties as a Crew Manager (CM) during 13th - 14th June, I will also mention other colleagues who I was with during this time and residents I had interaction with. After the incident I made contemporaneous notes which I may refer to for this statement. I have exhibited these notes as RJM/01.

I have worked for the London Fire Brigade since April 2004. I completed my initial firefighting training at SOUTHWARK before being posted to WEST NORWOOD on green watch. Whilst there I completed my driving qualification. In 2013 I then became a temporary Crew Manager (CM) at WEST NORWOOD however I moved to white watch. The post for Crew Manager (CM) was filled and I returned to a Firefighter. At the end of 2016 I then applied to become a Crew Manager (CM). I was successful and in February 2017 I was posted to WANDSWORTH as Crew Manager (CM) on red watch. I am currently on

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‘development’ as Crew Manager (CM). It can take anything between eighteen (18) months to three (3) years to achieve the status of ‘competent’.

On 13th June 2017 I started a nightshift at 20:00hrs. I was assigned to the pump ladder call sign H331. I was riding the back of the pump ladder. WANDSWORTH has only one (1) appliance. I recall that the evening had been a quiet evening, we had not had any shouts and I was catching up on office work. It was between 23:00hrs and 23:30hrs that I retired to my bed to sleep.

I was awoken by the bells sounding just after 01:30hrs on the 14th June. I always make a point of going to the watch room to see what incident we were being mobilised to. I saw from the teleprinter that we were being immobilised to a twenty (20) pump incident. I recall that there was the name of the tower block, GRENfell TOWER, and the estate name however there was no road name provided.

I got my fire gear and got onto the pump ladder. The machine has a built in Mobile Data Terminal (MDT). Usually the information for the incident we are due to attend is sent to the MDT however nothing had been sent to it. This is not the first time that the MDT has failed to work correctly.

We had a full complement riding on the pump ladder that evening with a crew of six (6). I was sitting on the back of the pump ladder in the middle with firefighter ERRINGTON. Either side of us was firefighter WRIGHT and firefighter ALASSAD. The driver was firefighter BELL and sitting at the front was our Watch Manager (WM) Jon PARKER, who was in charge of the machine.

We went mobile to incident, status two (2) and pulled out of WANDSWORTH fire station. As we did, on the radio I overheard H271 BATTERSEA call up control and request that the mobilisation was sent again to their MDT. Control replied saying that they could not resend. It sounded as though they were having the same issue as we were. Without the information being sent and not being in the area we usually work in, we had to use google maps to locate the incident. I used google maps on my mobile phone to direct us the best I could with the limited information provided by the call sheet.

We drove towards PUTNEY HIGH STREET and onto FULHAM borough, I was then looking at my phone to provide directions to firefighter BELL so I cannot recall the exact route we took. As we were

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driving I recall hearing the FSG (Fire Survival Guidance) calls coming over the radio. This signified to us that there were rescues in progress. Due to the lack of exact address or location of an RVP (rendezvous point) we just proceeded the best we could and as we got closer we managed to narrow down the location. As we drove onto NORTH KENSINGTON borough we then saw the Tower block for the first time. We approached from the SOUTH so we were facing NORTH. Looking at GRENFELL TOWER I could see flames going diagonally across the building from the bottom left of one (1) corner, up the building to the top right hand side. It almost looked like a linear lightning strike. My first thought upon seeing the building was 'I hope there's more than twenty (20) machines going to this'. My next thought was that without an RVP location we needed to get as close to the Tower as possible. It was only when we saw the fire ourselves that we were aware it was no longer an internal fire.

We arrived at the incident before 01:50hrs, the same time as two (2) other pumping appliances, one (1) from BATTERSEA (H271) and the other from FULHAM (G351). We parked up on STONELEIGH STREET and booked 'in attendance' status three (3). We got as close as we could bearing in mind there were other appliances already in attendance.

We dismounted from the appliance and between the three (3) appliances we discussed what equipment we should take. We all took our Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets. They were all Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA). At that stage we were not sure if there was a holding area however we could see a Command Unit and senior members of the brigade walking around in white helmets. We walked closer. Our Watch Manager, Jon PARKER booked us on to the incident and handed in our nominal role board. This is a small board which tells the Command Unit what appliances are in attendance, and who is on our appliance so they can keep a record of everyone present at the incident and what resources they have.

As we walked closer towards GRENFELL TOWER I could see that there was a holding area where firefighters were gathered. I could also see that PADDINGTON's Turntable Ladder (TL) was set up close to the Tower and being used to fight the fire externally. Close to the tower there was a fine mist of water in the air from the TL. This was the only TL I could see set up externally firefighting. The sports centre was behind us as we walked towards the Tower.

As we got closer I could hear the noise of the outer façade of the Tower falling to the ground. I heard the

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bangs of the aluminium window frames falling. The side of the Tower facing towards the sports hall was the side which had the diagonal line of fire. I could see the smoke bellowing out and could smell it as the wind was blowing. Once we were at the holding area I then concentrated on getting a brief and finding out what they wanted us to do as a crew.

I could see Battersea's Watch Manager (WM) Stuart BROWN; he said to us that we were going to be making our way into the TOWER however we needed breaking in equipment to achieve this. I turned around and I was with firefighter ERRINGTON, I said to her that I could not see a lot of equipment around and that we should go and get as much as we could. We left our BA sets at the holding area and went to the nearest appliances; we started to strip them of their breaking in equipment. This included equipment such as, crow's feet, crow bars, sledge hammers etc. I made an equipment dump near to the holding area and started to inform crews who were waiting to be committed. I made at least three (3) runs getting the equipment and it was approx. a fifty (50) metre walk to and from the appliances. Thermal imaging cameras were also part of the equipment we took. I recall seeing firefighters taking them inside the Tower however I never used one (1) myself.

The BA crews were being taken into the ground floor of the Tower block. In order to get to the main entrance you had to walk under a covered walkway area. I walked under there and saw a Watch Manager (WM) standing by this area. He was looking out for hazards as the crews were walking from the covered area to the main entrance. He was staring up at the Tower watching the falling debris and telling crews when it was safe to go inside.

At this point I saw that there was a Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) holding area being set up by the bins. I could see that there was a Watch Manager (WM) from WIMBELDON there and he said to me 'do you have a job at the moment? He explained that he had been given a number of FSG calls and needed them to be taken inside the block to the Watch Manager (WM) from FULHAM, Glynn WILLIAMS. He handed me some sheets of paper containing the FSG call information. I took these sheets in to Glynn WILLIAMS who was in the foyer area. He had drawn a table on the wall and was putting the details of the FSG calls coming in so that crews were briefed and sent to those floors. I returned outside to collect more. I was also assisting crews getting into the Tower. The FSG call sheets were being collected from the FSG Command Unit outside the Tower.

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Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) calls are when a member of the public contacts the control room stating that they are unable to leave their property due to smoke or fire. The control room staff would take the details of where they are, specific flat number, the floor and then the details of the specific issue such as, unable to leave the property due to smoke in the stairwell. They would then stay on the phone line to the member of public until the fire crew got to them. If the line was to drop out they would call them back. The information from the FSG would be sent to the FSG Command Unit. This specific Command Unit is always set up at incidents where FSG calls are made and only deals with FSG calls. The staff in the Command Unit would have blank FSG sheets. They would write the information onto this sheet and this would then be passed on to entry control to brief crews where searches need to be carried out

This is the process which was happening at GRENFELL TOWER. I made around six (6) or seven (7) trips back and forth with the FSG sheets. I was not able to read all of the calls and I was concentrating on getting them to in the Tower as quick as possible. I did not want to slow the process down by reading them. I was concerned with the amount of water and falling debris that if the sheet was to be damaged that information may not be passed on.

Once the Watch Manager (WM) from WIMBLEDON had no more sheets to give me I then helped to get the crews into the building. The riot police had arrived and had riot shields. I was assisting using the shields to get the crews in safely, holding it above them to protect them from the falling debris. I was assisting the crews to get from the holding area to the covered walkway. They then had to wait again until someone escorted them with a shield from the covered walkway to the ground floor of the Tower. At that point the debris was already above ankle height. There was a lot of water pouring out the building too. I couldn't say how long I spent assisting crews into the building however I would say I completed about ten (10) to twelve (12) runs. I was also ferrying equipment into the Tower. I recall that at one (1) point whilst on the ground floor I heard that an IEC (first aid) bag was needed so I got one (1) and took it in, it was needed at the bridgehead. I went up the mezzanine stairs, along the walk way and into the main stairwell up to the fourth floor to the Entry Control point. I gave the first aid kit over. Whilst on the ground floor and mezzanine level I had not noticed any smoke. It was not until I reached the bridgehead and looked up the stairwell that I noticed wisps of smoke making its way down the stairs. There was no smoke at the bridgehead at that point. I could not feel the heat of the fire from there either.

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About half way through assisting the crews into the building it became too dangerous to use the main entrance due to falling debris and the vast amount of water gathering there. The water was due to the amount the crews were using on the upper floors and because a length of hose had burst. There was a lot of equipment on the ground floor. I also noticed that smoke had now started to collect on the ground floor where BA crews were waiting to be briefed and committed. To ease this problem the glass doors of the main entrance were smashed to allow more air flow.

I then left the base of the building and made my way to the sports centre as I needed a break to get a drink and sit down. This was around 04:00hrs/04:30hrs. There were lots of crews sitting by the grass area and having a break. At this point I had stepped further back from the Tower and when I looked up I could see that it was now a block on fire rather than the initial diagonal line of flames which I had first seen upon arrival. I could see that it had almost reached the top of that Southern facing part of the Tower. I sat down and the sports centre was behind me and noticed that there was someone inside pointing a light out of the Tower. I initially thought that it was a BA Crew in the flat but then the light was flashing, trying to get someone's attention. I was next to a fire appliance so I raised the spotlight of the appliance up to the building. I mentally counted the floors, it was about floors ten (10) to twelve (12) floors up, just above half way. There was no way of knowing which flat number it was, It looked as though it was a smart phone torch. I could see them for between five (5) to ten (10) minutes. I went back into the Tower and asked if we had crews in that area? I was told there were crews up there.

After returning from my break I noticed that there seemed to be an altercation between the police and a member of the public. They were standing by the set of stairs above the covered walkway next to GRENFELL TOWER. They were by a garden area. The member of public was adamant that they needed to tell a firefighter where people were. I walked up to the garden area and the member of public was pointing out where people were in the flats and which floors. From handling the FSG calls, reading the chart that was on the wall in the foyer area, I knew that where they were pointing was where we already had crews. I told the member of the public that I would pass on the information. I then went to the WIMBLEDON Watch Manager (WM) and passed on the information of which floors people were on, this was passed on to the BA crews. I then assisted taking in crews with the riot police from the NORTH

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side of the Tower.

At around 06:30hrs -06:45hrs they needed to swap over some of the crews. They explained that the Entry Control Point was being moved from the fourth (4th) floor to the ground floor. I believe that this must have been due to the smoke logging starting on the fourth (4th) floor. I could not say what the smoke was like on any of the other floors as I never went higher than the fourth (4th) floor so I was not aware what the conditions were like.

I was told that my Watch Manager (WM), Jon PARKER and I were to take over the Entry Control Boards. They were running three (3) boards at that time. They were based at the bottom of the mezzanine stairs. They had a Watch Manager (WM) watching a board each, Jon PARKER, a Watch Manager (WM) from WIMBELDON and I am unsure of the name of the third Watch Manager (WM). I was designated to be the Communications officer. I took over from Crew Manager (CM), Danny MORRISON from TOOTING. He gave me a hand over and said one (1) thing to be aware of was that channel six (6) was not working. This took me by surprise as this was the communication channel between us and the crews up inside the building. He told me it was just a constant static noise as if something was broadcasting. He told me to tell the crews being committed to use channel one (1). Channel one (1) is ordinarily used as a fire ground channel and channel six (6) is designated as the BA channel. Upon hearing this I checked it myself, all I heard was a static noise which sounded like a mistuned FM radio station. I listened back to channel one (1) and could hear people trying to get hold of crews. He also said to me that the BA telemetry was not working and that they were having to work times out manually.

Due to the unreliability of the boards, Crew Manager (CM), Danny MORRISON had written a table onto the wall which showed the call signs of the committed crews, what time they had entered and what time they had left. Due to the vast amount of crews entering and leaving it was impossible to keep a mental note. When I took over this role I decided to make my own table on the wall to ensure I was clear. On the table that I made I put the BA crew's call sign, the time in, the equipment they had, a summary of the brief that they had been given and the time which they left. It was very important to know which crews had left so we could account for everyone still inside. The crews were getting briefed before they came to us. I recall that the briefs they were given were very basic, only stating which floor they were to go to. I recall that there was only one (1) brief which gave a specific flat number. I do not recall what that flat number was.

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I took a photo of the table I had drawn. I sent this to DC Roxanne DAWE I have now exhibited a print out of this as RJM/02.

The three (3) Watch Managers and I were all based together at the bottom of the stairs which was pretty tight. I was standing closest to the entrance so I was the first (1st) person the crews were coming across and reporting to. Due to us all being in close proximity we were all sharing the information gathered from the crews. Crews were coming in and out of the building continually between 07:00hrs and 09:00hrs. During the approximately two (2) hours or so that I was there, I recall seeing a couple of residents being brought out of the building via the stairwell.

The entire time that I spent inside GRENFELL TOWER the radio communications never worked. At one (1) point around 0800, GM Pat GOULBOURNE who was overseeing the Entry Control Boards said to us that we needed to get all of the crews out of the Tower and change the burst length of hose.

I explained to GM Pat GOULBOURNE that we hadn't had any telemetry with the crews and hadn't been able to communicate with them. I explained that I could radio them requesting them to leave however I would not have confirmation that they had received the message via their BA sets as they did not have signal.

The Entry Control Boards should work on a 4G network. Each fire fighter's BA set is linked to an Entry Control Board. Once a fire fighter's tally is put into the Entry Control Board, the board then keeps a constant check on the pressure of their cylinder and the working duration of their cylinder. Messages can be relayed between the BA set and Entry Control Board this reduces radio traffic and allows to keep a constant eye on each person's working duration and the time to their whistle. There is a function to press a withdrawal button which sends a signal and pixelated image to each BA set. Once a fire fighter receives this message they then press a button to acknowledge the message. This function was never utilised at GRENFELL TOWER as there was no signal. As a second port of call we used the fire ground radio, I relayed a message across the radio requesting crews to withdraw. Only one (1) or two (2) got back to us to say that had received it so I am not sure if everyone managed to hear the message. Crews were naturally withdrawing due to their lack of air and we did not send any others back in. By looking at the

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Entry Control Board and the table I had drawn we confirmed that all crews were out. GM Pat GOULBOURNE wanted to withdraw crews quicker however we were not able to do this.

Once all crews were out we were informed that the Entry Control was to be moved up to the fourth (4th) floor, this was to reduce the travel time for the crews once they had been committed. We started to take all of the equipment up and establish the Entry Control.

After this we were called up on the radio and informed that we were being relieved. It was around 09:15hrs - 09:20hrs me out e Tower. It was daylight, bright sunshine when I looked up at GRENFELL TOWER I could see that it was now more smoke than fire, I could still see some pockets of fire where parts of the building were still alight. It was no longer fully evolved.

I started to head over towards the Command Unit and our appliance when I came across the fire fighters from my crew. Watch Manager (WM), John PARKER collected our nominal role board and then we all went to the appliance together and left the incident. Our appliance was not blocked in however other appliances were. I think that they were trying to get the initial attending appliances moved to allow the relief appliances room to attend. We were informed that we were to go to PADDINGTON Fire Station to make our contemporaneous notes. We done this and then made our way back to WANDSWORTH fire station. We arrived back to WANDSWORTH Fire Station about 11:30 -12:00hrs and I left to go home about 12:00hrs - 12:30hrs.

I had never been to GRENFELL TOWER before the incident so I had no prior knowledge of the building or any prepared plans for the building. When I was there inside the Tower I do not recall hearing any alarms sounding however I only went higher than the ground floor on one (1) occasion. I did not see any sprinklers.

I have received training on how to fight fires in a high rise buildings and the Brigade has high rise policies in place. It was also part of my Crew Manager (CM) training and exam which I had recently studied for and refreshed my own memory. It is a hot topic on incident command courses too.

Our core skills training includes various subjects which are rotational on a monthly basis and we will

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spend a month on that one (1) subject area. For example one (1) month the training may be about HazMats, one (1) month about RTC's (Road Traffic Collisions) and the following month may be high rise blocks.

As part of high rise block firefighting core skills we train on the tower block within the fire station at WANDSWORTH. To stimulate a high rise we use the fifth (5th) floor as the tenth (10th). We put our policies and procedure into place by establishing a bridge head, going over what equipment we would need and who would do which role. This is to ensure that everyone knows the ground work well enough in training to be able to complete it at an incident.

Before GRENFELL TOWER I had never attended an incident in a high rise block where the high rise procedure had been put into place and had to establish a bridgehead etc. Part of the high rise policy is compartmentation. Where the construction and layout of the building reduces the spread of smoke and fire, assisting firefighter operations.

Compartmentation should work in high rise buildings and I was not aware of any plan in place if this was to fail in a high rise block. The 'Stay Put' policy is when residents are safer to stay in their property than leave and told to stay where they are. This is only if their flat is not directly affected by the fire. This allows us to know where the residents are and if they are safe. This also aids access for crews entering the building.

I have never received any training or information on the fire risk that external cladding panels posed prior to the GRENFELL TOWER fire.

The use of rising main is to reduce the amount of hose used in a building. Part of the high rise procedure is that BA crews would set into the riser wherever they need to. That supplies them with a supply of water on the floor which they need it for.

In regards to the dry riser at GRENFELL TOWER I did not use it. The only involvement I had was that at one (1) point I was asked by a Station Manager (SM) to lay out a length of hose in case there were any damaged lengths set into the dry riser. I soon realised that crews from North Kensington and Paddington

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had already set out a backup hose for the dry riser so I did not need to complete this task.

The fire at GRENFELL TOWER went very quickly from the external lateral line of fire to the whole building being engulfed. The fire did not behave how you would expect it to behave. Tower blocks are supposed to be built for the fire to be contained and that evening it just did not happen. We train and practice policy so that at an incident it becomes second nature what is needed to be done. However due to the external nature of the fire it changed everything; training in compartmentation, the high rise procedures, stay put policy and the safety of members of the public and ourselves. By the time I arrived the only way we could have fought the fire was internally.

The Command Unit was a point of contact on the fire ground where the Senior Officers were making operational decisions. This is where the crews would report to. My role was a support role, facilitating things that needed to be done. I was not part of the Command Unit or decision making process.

I did not receive any injury or need any treatment from LAS or my GP; however due to so many different materials being ablaze the framework and cladding was burning and dripping down causing a hazard. When I returned to the station I noticed that the arms and shoulders of my fire jacket were burnt. The molten metal and aluminium material had burnt holes into it and there was plastic stuck to it. When I was at the scene I recall watching some of this burning material drip on to a firefighter as he went into GRENFELL TOWER and it must have touched his skin as I could see that he flinched a little.

There were several issues which did not assist firefighting at the Tower. The first issue was the mobilisation, we did not have specific location information, and there was no RVP address. The MDT was not working which hindered us whilst being mobilised and when at the incident the radios weren't working properly. These communication issues slowed the process down. The MDT is linked to the 7 2 (d) information, hazards of the building etc, we did not have access to any of this information as the MDT was just sat in Standby mode. The software and infrastructure on the MDT is outdated. When I heard BATTERSEA calling up for the mobilisation information to be resent to their MDT I heard control say that they could not resend it. This must have been due to them being really busy as I know from personal experience that it can be resent.

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The second issue was the radio communications. We could not contact crews within the Tower. I recall years ago the new radios were introduced we had a communication team come down to the watch that I was on and show us the new radios. I recall that they were designed to be fitted to individual firefighter's helmets, when we took out the radios the instructions showed how they were meant to be fitted, the team took the instructions from us. The radios were instead mounted to the facemasks of the BA sets and not the helmets as designed. In my opinion, the radios were not fit for purpose.

A third issue which hindered us was the telemetry not linking to the fire fighters sets. As mentioned earlier in my statement, the system works on a 4G network and if there is no signal to them the system will not work. I have tested the telemetry before at a fire station and it lost signal with the firefighter's BA set when only two (2) rooms away.

Another issue which slowed the firefighting process down was stairwell and its design. There was a staggered stairwell. From the ground floor there was an initial stairwell with a few floors, then you had to walk along a walkway until you reached a smaller and narrower stairwell. This stairwell was only about a meter wide, it was very narrow and poorly lit. This stairwell was tight for firefighters getting up and down carrying items such as breaking in equipment, hoses, first aid equipment etc. The firefighters had to wait for each other to come down before they went up as there was not enough room to pass. This hindered and slowed the process down. I only went to the fourth floor however I recall the layout being 'H' shape with the lifts in the middle and the flats coming off from either side of the lift.

Several tours of duty after the GRENFELL TOWER fire there were many people within the Brigade that were thanking us however it then very quickly it turned to fire safety. It was very quickly brought to our attention that there are over a hundred (100) high rise blocks on our Borough. The responsibility quickly fell back to us at each individual fire station. A high rise is anything that is over six (6) floors. These have to be visited and the 7 2 (d) information updated. There is a risk matrix to work from and each block will have different risks. The risk matrix score will determine how often a block needs to be visited.

Each high rise block has information placed on the 'Premise Information System' which is electronic and referred to as an 'E PIP'. This information was originally meant to be places on metal plates on the front

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of the blocks of flats however after a pilot scheme it was decided that there would be monetary implications and the data would just be held on an electronic system. The information includes things such as where the dry riser is, if the block has a fire lift. There can be problems with this information and this is why each block is checked on a rotational basis.

WANDSWORTH has been a one (1) appliance station since 2014. Trying to attend over a hundred (100) E PIPS with one (1) appliance is a difficult task. We are already pushed and since the GRENFELL TOWER fire we have now had to make these a priority, until we have completed all one hundred (100) E PIPS. I feel as though the brigade are putting too much on to us as individuals and crews.

On a daily basis we are not allowed to leave the station until after the strategic resource has been confirmed. This can sometimes take until 12:30hrs depending on time of year and what tour it is. A printer message will be sent to us once confirmed and only then are we allowed to leave the station to complete tasks such as E PIPS.

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