

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: COAKER, SAM

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

Occupation: LFB

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: S. COAKER

Date: 18/10/2017

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

This statement refers to the morning after the Grenfell Tower fire on the 14th June 2017. I am an Operations Manager (OM) for the London Fire Brigade based at Merton SW19. I have worked for the London Fire Brigade for 25 years and have worked in a variety of roles. I joined the Control Room staff as a CRO in January 1998 and have remained in this environment ever since. I became an Assistant Operations Manager in 2005 and my first duty in this role was the 7/7 bombings. I was made a temporary OM in January 2010 and later substantive in the September. I am the current OM for Watch 5 which was the watch that took over from the night shift following the Grenfell Tower fire.

The role of an OM is the top level of the Control Room structure and bridges the gap with senior management. As an OM the running of the 'floor' of the Control Room should be managed by the Assistant Operations Managers (AOMs), however often due to staff shortages the OM acts as another supervisor as well as carrying out other duties. These duties include ensuring that all the prerequisite administration is completed per shift. This will involve managing leave of staff, ensuring the accurate management of rotas, managing overtime availability and daily bulletins to senior management. Often other staff members assist with these tasks and as an OM I have oversight of this. Once the admin is completed the work on the floor begins in earnest. My role involves managing the staff and dealing with live incidents to managing available resources. It is also my responsibility for managing the amount of cover across London. The LFB have certain obligations they have to carry out. One of which is the

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Strategic Resourcing; meaning that every watch and every crew and stations has the opportunity to complete up-to-date training. However obligations also include community engagements such as school fetes and community visits. It forms part of our public facing role. The OM facilitates a lot of this and has to consider that some resources will be unavailable for the duration of a shift because of these obligations. The redirection of resources is based upon statistical analysis of when crews are least likely to be needed. The same statistic are utilised for staffing levels in the Control Rooms, for example on night shifts we carry less staff. This becomes a big problem when there are incidents like Grenfell Tower.

On the morning of the 14th June 2017, I was scheduled to work a day shift on a new tour of shifts; beginning with a twelve hour day shift from 8am-8pm, followed by a short shift of either 8am-4pm or 2pm-10pm and finished with a night shift 8pm-8am and then three days off. I live in [REDACTED] and have to get up early to travel in to either Merton or, as it was on that day, to Stratford in east London. Stratford is our 'fall back' centre for when there is routine maintenance. Stratford is generally much better for people to get to from all areas because it is so central and lends itself much better for people being able to get in early. The facility is not like Merton. It is much smaller but allows for a better line of sight and hearing for the supervisors to oversee the CROs and be more involved in any decision making process. Merton is a much larger working area meaning to get a good grasp of the feel for the room you have to walk around and therefore cannot instantaneously tune in to a call when needed. Stratford allows you to have a better feel for what is going on at any given time and is a similar lay out to Merton - an oblong room with supervisors at the back and CROs in a horse shoe shape around the edges.

I was awake by 4.30am and remember how bright and clear it was already. My husband woke up and happened to look at the news on his iPad and said, "You need to see this". As it happened, I did not actually look at his iPad, but he proceeded to tell me that there was a very large fire in London. Without hesitating I got up straight away and began to make my way in to work, leaving at 5am. I think I arrived at sometime around 6.15am, but had phoned in to see if anything needed doing or picking up whilst I was en route. I spoke to Kate RANSON, one of the AOMs who had been called in on a rest day, and she said there was nothing that needed doing. Having arrived and walking into the Control Room I immediately saw my counterpart, Alex NORMAN. I will never forget her face. She was in shock, without a doubt. It was awful. At that point I think the incident was only five hours old which is nothing in the grand scheme of major incidents and yet all resources had seemingly been utilised and there was nothing further they could do. Tragically they knew that to be the case which must have been horrendous. Alex's team had

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been short staffed that night which meant that absolutely everyone had been taking calls - even Alex as the OM. By that time the Control Room was in hiatus in terms of new emergency calls to Grenfell Tower. The information was up to date and it was known who could be reached and who could not.

Alex had given me a potted history of the last four to five hours and she said that about an hour and a half in to the incident the advice from the ground commander was that the policy had been changed and were people were to get out. This is the first time in my experience I have ever known of a fire that is supposed to be compartmentalised not being so and owing to the facts that everyone was presented with I absolutely agree that it was the right decision to make. In scenarios such as this we in the Control Room would be guided by the incident commander and if they say it needs to change then it needs to change.

I was aware that the on call counsellor had been paged and was already in and ready to speak to the night shift. She began speaking to them straight away and I was aware they were still going on later in the day.

The handover from night shift to day was not a normal standard handover. A normal handover would normally involve resolving staffing issues, understanding the current operational picture - any calls or incidents that were being attended and responding to new information received whilst off duty such as correspondence that needed actioning, specific operational instructions, temporary changes to mobilising and any issues that needed addressing that could not be done during normal office hours. On the morning of Grenfell, it was constantly in flux over the next hour and a half; every five minutes it could be different. On a normal day, 8am is the cut off time but this was stretched out for everyone. At the same time there were still the usual routine calls for road traffic accidents and fire alarms that still required attendance. We were aware of the extensive radio traffic and communication with the police helicopter. The helicopter was giving specific information regarding the location of a blind man in one of the flats; flat 87 I think. The information was relayed to the crews on the ground and we later heard, were able to rescue him.

Between 7.30am-7.45am I began shadowing Jo SMITH and Scott HAYWARD, the Senior and Principal Operations Managers. Our staffing levels were correct and I was able to leave the running of the room to the AOMs for the time being. We were trying to gather as much information as possible from Alex and her two AOMs, Pete MAY and Debbie REAL. At the same time, we were facilitating the flow of information, especially around the number of Fire Survival Guidance calls which had been dealt with by the night between the senior officers in the Control Room who had set up the Brigade Command Centre

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(BCC). My day Watch did not deal with any FSGs and all plans and procedures had already been agreed prior to our arrival. I was also not cited on any decision logs.

Present throughout were the DACs Alan PEREZ and Adrian FENTON as well as Station Managers Mark REED and Paul MCCLLENAGHAN. Mark REED manages the Resource Management Centre (RMC) and the Standby Module Team (SMB) essentially ensures there is fire cover everywhere and manages the crews to maximise fire cover. He was acutely aware that staffing levels needed to be adequately managed and also that Red Watch' crews working that night were due back in for 8pm. A lot of coordination was needed to manage this but thankfully a lot of the relieving crews were willing to stay on to support their colleagues which helped massively with running the brigade that evening.

The remainder of the shift actually ran very smoothly and we had adequate resources to cover the rest of London. The resourcing did not stop all day and despite the huge incident, we had sufficient resources in reserve to deal with anything. To my knowledge none of my staff too (took) any calls from Grenfell Tower that day. Alex did not leave the Control Room until about 8.30am and Scott and Jo, who had come in through the night, were still in for quite a while afterwards but eventually left at different times. The AOMs continued to concentrate on the management of the relief crews and appliances.

The corresponding handover to night Watch was handled by my AOMs, Mark and Amelia. They appraised them of the current situation; officer numbers and the number of appliances at scene, as well as the rendezvous points and staffing levels - a snapshot of the situation. A pretty standard handover, all things considered.

I remember my Watch were deeply concerned and upset at how much the previous night had affected their colleagues. Everyone was offered counselling if required and I know a number of them took up the offer. Since the change in senior leadership and following on from the recommendations after Lakanal in 2009 there have been a number of positive changes in the running of the Brigade. There is a greater understanding of the need for counselling following tragic incidents and it is much more structured and focussed on looking after the staff. Grenfell was an unprecedented event and highlighted the need for this approach.

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