

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: WEST, STEPHEN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 8 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 WEST

Date: 25/05/2018

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

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This statement refers to the Grenfell Tower Fire and my attendance at the scene.

I am Steve WEST, call sign F113, a Group Manager (GM) for the London Fire Brigade (LFB), currently deployed at the Borough Commander for Enfield. I joined the London Fire Brigade in 1997 and following the completion of my initial 20 weeks training, worked at Homerton Fire Station. From there I was promoted to leading firefighter at Kingsland Fire Station before going on to the Command Unit (CU) at Islington. I was posted as a Watch Manager (WM) at Harold Hill Fire Stations before being promoted to Station Manager (SM) at Kentish Town. I worked as SM at Harrow, Enfield and then Homerton Fire Stations. I have been in my current role since July 2016, initially as a temporary GM before being made substantive in April 2018.

In my role I am responsible for the day to day running of LFB activities in the London Borough of Enfield and the Fire Stations within the borough, Southgate, Edmonton and Enfield. Each station has a Station Manager (SM) who reports to me. There are 156 firefighters in the borough with 41 being on duty at any one time for each watch. There are 10 appliances based in the borough. I am responsible for the strategic oversight of the borough in addition to representing the LFB at meetings within the borough about interagency issues including community safety, anti-social behaviour, road improvements and crime reduction.

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Edmonton Fire Station, where I am based, is also a specialist rescue centre and in addition to the normal fire engines, a pump and a pump ladder, it has a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capabilities. The USAR capability is a national asset and can be deployed anywhere in the country as required. There is also a command unit based there.

As a GM I work a shift pattern that is not attached to any watch. I work shifts of either 9 hours or 24 hours. 24 hour shifts run from 0800 hours to 0800 hours the following day and you never do more than 2 consecutively. You are on call overnight and will be alerted to large incidents or any incident where a SM is mobilised by pager. The LFB has a predetermined response to different types of incident and for any incident which requires 7-10 pumps, a GM will be mobilised to the incident as Incident Commander. This was not particularly common prior to the Grenfell Tower Fire but is more common after it as the LFB has changed its pre-determined response to various incidents meaning that it is more common for a large number of pumps to be deployed.

In addition to being deployable as an Incident Commander, I also have specialist skills for which I can be deployed. These are as a Fire Safety Officer or a HAZMAT and Environmental Protection Officer. As a Fire Safety Officer, I can be called on to provide advice about any fire safety issues including a fire that has spread beyond a compartment, fires where the means of escape have been compromised and blocked fire exits. I have the authority to stop a building from operating if they are in serious breach of fire regulations and the building is unsafe.

As a HAZMAT Environmental Protection Officer, I can be called on to provide advice about any incident involving hazardous materials or anything that could have an impact on the environment. These can include gas incidents or a chemical leak into water.

For both the HAZMAT and the fire safety officer role I receive refresher training 4 times a year. I also complete the Incident Commanders course annually. This is a course hosted by Babcock's which lasts either 1 or 2 days. Sometimes if there is a free space on one of these courses I will fill the spot and complete it more regularly to make sure that I am up to date and fully aware of all the policy and procedure involved with this role. Additionally, due to my HAZMAT qualification, I also keep my Breathing Apparatus (BA) training up to date unlike other GM's who are not required to wear breathing apparatus.

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I am also on the Operational Review Team (ORT). This is a team of 8 officers who operate an on call roster to attend large incidents to make sure that they are being managed in line with policy and procedure and to provide advice to the incident commander. They also make sure that the policies that are in place are effective and that firefighters are being kept safe. ORT officers report directly to the Commissioner of the LFB, Dany COTTON. An on call ORT officer will be notified of any 4 pump incident, and any an incident with multiple calls; and be required to attend any 6 pump incident and for any incident where over 8 pumps are mobilised, 2 ORT officers will attend the scene. At the time of the Grenfell Tower fire I was a not a full ORT officer and I was completing shadowing to get my skills up in the role. If you are on call for ORT you cannot be called to be an Incident Commander or for any other specialism. The page for an ORT officer to attend is sent to all the officers on the CADRE but only the ones on call are required to respond. It is sent to second pager that I have specifically for ORT.

I have vast experience of attending flat fires throughout my career in the LFB, and in the majority of these the fire has not spread beyond the flat or compartment that it has started in. The LFB advises a stay put policy for residents of tower blocks where there is a fire in a flat that is not the one that they are in. It is the safest place for them to stay and if everyone left their flats and tried to leave the tower it can cause havoc. There can sometimes be smoke in communal areas which should not spread into their flat due to the fire doors but could cause them problems if they leave the flat and go into it. It can also cause problems for firefighters going up the stairs to the fire if there are large numbers of people coming down evacuating.

If someone is trapped inside their flat or a building or believes that they are trapped by a fire or the product of fire and have phoned our control room then it is dealt with as a Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) call. The line to them is kept open and the operator continues to give them advice as to how to stay safe. Resources are then sent to the scene to rescue this person, normally a CU, a pump ladder and a SM. Details of how many people and where they are is then sent to Incident Commander or if they cannot be raised another appliance on its way to the incident. Each engine contains a Control Information Form on a pad in the front of the cab. The idea is that they write down the details of the message that they receive from control over the radio. Once the message has been received, it is repeated back to control to make sure that it has been transmitted and understood. These messages are always dealt with as a priority. I am not sure, but I think control would also initiate this if it was a third party report that there was someone trapped in a fire.

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Before the major fire, I had never been to Grenfell Tower and was not familiar with it. I am not aware of any specific firefighting or evacuation plans for the tower.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I was on a 24 hour shift which started at 0800 hours. I was on call as a shadow ORT officer, shadowing SM Mick MULLHOLLAND and Group Manager Matt COOK. I cannot remember what I did during the day but think that I spent it at my office in Edmonton Fire Station and went home to Romford between 1700 and 1800 hours. I cannot remember anything noteworthy taking place in the shift until my pager went off at either 0055 or 0057 hours. I was asleep in bed when the page came through. It was the first notification about the incident and stated that it was a 4 pump fire and would have contained the location. I am not sure of any other information that it contained. Like normal, to get more information about the incident, I phoned the control room but I could not get through as they were busy. I phoned Mick, which I would normally do as the shadow officer to tell him what further information control had provided me with and whether I thought we should deploy or not. I told him that I could not get through to control which I thought was strange. He told me that the incident had been upgraded to an 8 or 10 pump fire, I can't recall which. It is highly unusual for an incident to be escalated that quickly and the fact that I could not get through to control, presumably as they were too busy, made me think that it was a dynamic incident and it was a serious incident that they were responding to. As it had gone up to 10 pumps, our attendance was now mandatory, so I said to Mick that I would see him at the incident.

I set off from my home, driving my car with blue lights and sirens. It did not take me long to get to the incident, no more than 30 minutes which seemed like a quick journey. I am not very familiar with west London and cannot remember the exact route that I took but I do remember going along the A40. The traffic was really bad, all 3 lanes were stationary, as cars had parked up across the road haphazardly, to watch and video the fire. This slowed me down and delayed me from getting to the incident quicker which was annoying. I saw the fire myself from the A40. It looked like the bottom corner of the tower was on fire. I came off the A40. I cannot remember where I parked but I could see the tower and it looked like something out of a film. I remember the noise was deafening with people screaming and shouting. I could not hear what they were screaming but it was coming from people in the tower and also on the ground. I remember seeing that there were a lot of lights on in the tower which made me think that there were still lots of people inside the tower. I do not think that I was given an RVP to attend.

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I got out of the car and got my fire ground gear out. Matt COOK, the second ORT officer who was on call other than Mick pulled up in front of me. He was on the phone which is not unusual as ORT officers are the link to the scene for senior officers who have call signs that begin with C. They will often call the ORT officer at scene to ask about the possible escalation to a level of when they will have to attend or with any other questions about the incident. I do not know who Matt was on the phone to, I assumed it was an Assistant Commissioner (AC) or another staff officer. Matt set off from the cars towards the fire ground and I followed him.

The CU was parked on Bomore Road. I have marked its location on a map of the area around Grenfell Tower and it is labelled on the map as "CU". I produce this map as exhibit SLW/1.

As we approached the CU, there were lots of people outside who were waving phones towards us and asking us to speak to a relative who they had on the phone or asking if we had got up to a certain floor yet. There were too many people to respond to and if you had spoken to one person you would have had to help them all. There was not much that I could say to them on the phone and it was more important for me to assist with the incident command than help individuals. All I could see was the screens of the phones being waved towards me, I had to push through them to the command unit which may have come across as rude to those wanting help. The noise was still deafening, I have never experienced anything like it.

The door to the CU was open and Mick MULLHOLLAND was already on there with staff from the CU when me and Matt got on. GM Richard WELCH, who was the Officer in charge (OIC) at this time, was there and Matt said that he had spoken to an AC about declaring a major incident. Richard asked me what role I had been deployed to fulfil and I told him that I was shadow ORT. I realised the size and scale of the incident though and the need for people to help and do jobs to assist the Incident Commander. Having a shadow ORT at the incident would have been a luxury so I said to Richard that I could do anything that he need me to help with. Richard asked me to do the METHANE message. METHANE is an acronym which is used across all of the emergency services to provide the information needed by all emergency services prior to attendance. It stands for Major Incident, Exact Locations, Type, Hazards, Access, Number of casualties and Emergency Services in attendance and required.

Straight after Richard had asked me to do this, DAC Andy O'LOUGHLIN came onto the CU. Richard told him that he had made pumps 40 for the fire. I started writing METHANE out on to a whiteboard

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inside the control room. I wrote down M - Major Incident, and was trying to ascertain the Exact Location of the tower to complete to write next to the E. Whilst I knew it was Grenfell Tower, I did not know its address or the road that it was on. I noted down the exact location and the recorded the type of incident as fire but before I could complete the rest, I was asked to get radio Channel 2 up and running for the command structure. Channel 1 was being used as the incident channel by everyone and it was so busy that it was impossible to get a message sent out on it. I was asked to set up Channel 2 so that it could be exclusively used by the commanding officers and the command units. I asked Mark DEAN, who works on the CU at Edmonton, to go around to the other CU's and tell them to switch over to that channel. However we could not get the channel to work and no messages could be sent or received using it.

There was another CU around the corner on Grenfell Road which was dealing with FSG calls. I have marked this on the map as "CU FSG". Then Andy ROE, who was now OIC, needed to know the numbers of persons trapped within the tower. As Channel 1 was too busy to keep transmitting on and Channel 2 would not work I had to keep going between the 2 CU's to get the number of persons reported in the FSG calls and come back to the Command CU to report them to the AC. The FSG CU was writing the numbers of persons reported as being inside on a whiteboard on the wall. They had got hold of a chart which showed what flat numbers were on which floor. It was the type of board that you would find in a lobby of a block of flats next to the lift. It looked like they had taken this one out of the tower so that they could understand what floors people were in when the message came to them that they were trapped in a flat and the flat number was given to them. The number of persons reported inside the tower kept going up quickly. It started off at 77 before going up to 91 then 128 and higher later on, it was continuously getting higher. They had divided the numbers of people trapped into adults and children for each floor with the block drawn on the whiteboard to show which floor they were on.

Each time I went between the 2 CUs, I would get asked by more people to speak to their relative on the phone or for information as to what floor we were rescuing. I did not speak to any of them and had to ignore them as I had a job to do. It was important that the OIC knew the numbers of persons trapped as that could change his response and I was not able to assist these people. Some of them were even knocking on the doors to the CU when we were in there. It was manic around the scene, people were shouting and you could still hear people screaming from the direction of the tower. There was noise coming from all around, it was horrible, I have never experienced anything like that. From where the CU's were, you could see the tower over the top of the low rise blocks and could see the fire covering the

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building. Throughout the night, the fire kept spreading and more and more of the lights inside flats in the tower that I had earlier seen on went off as the flat became overcome with the fire. I cannot remember for how long I kept going between the 2 CU's for, it did not seem like very long at the time but must have been hours. I spent most of the night at the CU on Bomore Road.

At one point in the night, I took a walk around the scene in order to get a grip of what was going on and what other resources were needed. There was a firefighter staging area on the green in between the tower and the sports centre. This was being used by firefighters to change the cylinder on their BA sets and rest before they went in. I spoke to some of the firefighters there, they seemed nervous and shocked at what they were seeing. I told them that they would be going into the building, it would not be nice and that they would have a bit of waiting to do on both sides of the tower before going into the lobby and being committed.

By now it was daylight and as I walked around the site, I was made aware of a deceased person who had jumped from the tower and lost their leg being in one of the garages under the walkway next to the tower. I was also aware of some deceased persons near the bottom of the tower. It had not been possible to tell through the night what was falling from the tower, whether it was people or debris. There was lots of debris piled up on the floor around the tower.

The police had now got a cordon in place and were keeping people back, away from the tower. Access to it was difficult with the debris falling. There was a protected area on one side by the garages as part of an underground walkway but either side of the tower there were large unprotected areas.

When you walked completely through the underground walkway, you came out of a door on the other side of the tower. There was a path here that led to Bramley Road. At the top of this path there were a couple of deceased people, at some point in the night a tent was set up over them. I think these bodies had been moved to this place, rather than fallen there. At the end of the walkway towards Bramley Road, there was a fire engine pumping water towards the tower, where some ladders and hoses had been set up in the playground. This engine could not get any closer to the tower as the path was blocked off. The only other engine close to the tower was just out of the walkway on the sports centre side. There was also an aerial appliance on this side spraying water at the tower. No other engines could get in close enough as there was no other roads that ran to or close to the tower. Whilst I was doing this, AC Andy ROE and the Commissioner, Dany COTTON came on to the CU.

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I went into the tower and spoke to GM Pat GOLBOURNE on the mezzanine in the lobby who was running the bridgehead. I asked him if he had enough resources and he confirmed that he did. There was water cascading down the stairs inside the tower which was making a lot of noise. There were crews waiting to be committed up the stairs. It seemed calm inside the tower compared with what had been going on outside. There was a sense of urgency but no screaming or shouting. The screaming from the tower had started to tail off as day broke and the scene became eerily quiet. I was in the tower for no more than five minutes and did not see any deceased people in there. I did not hear any smoke alarms or see any sprinklers inside the tower.

I went back to the CU and reported back on the scene to the AC and told them that Pat had said that he had enough resources and told them who his safety officer was, which I can no longer remember.

I am not sure of the time, but at one point I was part of a meeting with the commissioner, Andy ROE and various other officers. The commissioner had shut the door to the command unit and told us that there may well come a point where it became unsafe to commit firefighters into the tower. She logged this as a decision, SM Jackie MCCONAGHIE was acting as loggist for the commissioner and the incident. Whilst Andy ROE was the OIC, the commissioner was acting as the monitoring officer. The monitoring officer is always one rank above the OIC and is there to assist and review the OIC's decisions and command of the incident. At no point did this actually happen or this decision actually have to be made.

Whilst in the CU in a meeting, the phone rang on the CU and the staff who answered handed the phone to me saying that it was an urgent call from a DAC. I took the phone and spoke to DAC FENTON who was calling from the Brigade Co-ordination Centre (BCC). He asked me to ask the Commissioner if they could change the stay put advice that the call handlers were giving to persons trapped inside the tower. The Commissioner was in the middle of a discussion but I told her that I had an urgent query from DAC FENTON and relayed his message to her. She told to tell him to do whatever we needed to in order to get people out of the tower. I passed this message on to DAC FENTON and Jackie logged the decision. I do not know what effect this change of decision regarding the stay put policy had on the people inside the tower. It was fully alight and I do not know if anyone was able to subsequently get out of the tower by self-evacuating. Something had clearly gone wrong with the building and the fire was not staying in the compartments like it was supposed to. We needed to change the advice we were giving because of this.

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I had seen that the LFB catering van had arrived and was parked at the end of the sports centre, further down Bomore Road. I have marked this on the map as "Canteen Van." It was next to the police canteen van. After several hours I needed a drink so went over to it to get a cup of coffee. There was only 1 firefighter at the canteen van. Despite everything else that I had seen, it was this that made me realise the severity of the incident and how different it was. No firefighters other than one were stopping to take on food and water. The rest were all still working and waiting to go back into the tower even though the incident had been going on for several hours. I sat down on the wall outside the front of the sport centre and cried. I saw on my phone that I had several missed calls and messages from friends and family asking if I was at the incident and checking that I was ok. I rang my partner and told her that I was ok and how bad the incident was. I said to her it was worse than Lakanal but I was ok and could she let everyone else know as I was too busy to do so. After taking a moment to compose myself, I went back to the command unit.

When I got back onto the CU on Bomore Road, DAC Lee DRAWBRIDGE, came onto the command unit. He asked me if I would come with him to another CU to assist with Command Support. I agreed and together with him and WM Mark DEAN we went to a CU on Bramley Road, opposite a pub. I have marked this on the map as "CU Command Support". Initially Mark DEAN could not remember where he had parked the CU but we soon found it. We had to walk the long way around the tower as the walkway under the tower was now shut off. I am not sure of the exact route that we took.

We got to the CU and opened it up. From here we assisted with the planning of resources and the logistics of relieving firefighters. The USAR teams deploy in minibuses to various incidents so I arranged for these minibuses to collect extended duration breathing apparatus wearers from FRU's who were not at the incident and bring them to the scene. The minibus would then collect firefighters who had been at the incident overnight, and take them to the de-brief that we had arranged at Paddington Fire Station.

Whilst we were there members of the public started bringing fresh food down to the scene for the emergency services. The pub on Bramley Road had also opened up to allow us to use the toilets if we required.

The appliances closest to the tower had been pumping throughout the night so I arranged for fuel to be delivered to keep them going. I also arranged for the Protective Equipment Group (PEG) to attend with

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more BA & PPE supplies to make sure that we had enough BA to keep firefighters equipped. Andy ROE said to me after the incident that we had done a good job of this in the command support role.

I do not know exactly how long was at the incident but gave a verbal hand over to either Steve DUDENEY or Jamie JENKINS, I am not sure which. I left the incident in my car, the traffic was horrendous getting away from the tower. I phoned Lee DRAWBRIDGE and told him that I was going to go straight home rather than to the debrief at Paddington as I was spent. I got home at approximately 1600 hours and was not due back in work until the next day.

The crews that I spoke to who were turning up as relief were saying that when they saw the images of the fire on TV they could not believe that it was in the UK. By the time they were turning up and up to when I left the fire was mostly out and the tower was just a smoking shell.

Since the incident, I have been receiving counselling. It is not nice to think about what happened and I cannot completely remember all of the events that took place. The support from the LFB has been excellent and there is a great peer support network. I think that the Grenfell Tower fire has changed the way the LFB look after its staff and has made it more acceptable to talk about how incidents affect them. Previously if you had said that an incident had affected you would have been mocked but this has changed and people talk about incidents.

On the night of the incident, I think that the LFB did a good job. There is no equipment or resource that would have changed what happened. The LFB was on the back foot from the start as there has been no fire in the history of the LFB that has behaved in that way. Flat fires should not behave like that. Since Grenfell, the pre-determined response to high rise blocks of flats and more pumps are dispatched.

During the incident I took 9 photographs, one of the board detailing which flat was on which floor and others of the tower and surrounding scene. I have emailed these 9 photographs to DC Chris BAILEY.

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