

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: PIMBLETT, SUE

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

Occupation: TEAM LEADER NORTHWEST FIRE

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: S PIMBLETT

Date: 24/11/2017

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

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

This interview was audio recorded on the 24 November 2017 and took place at North West Fire Control.

Present during this interview were DC Emma HARRIS and DC David PEARL working on the Grenfell Fire Investigation and Paula PARKES Operations Manager 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 am a team leader, assisting my other two (2) colleagues at North West Fire Control based at Lingley Mere Business Park, Lingley Green Avenue, Great Sankey, Warrington, WA5 3UZ. Our main role is to provide supervision to the team by means of training, personal guidance anything that may involve moving forward with new ideas, new initiatives, new procedures, new practices, assistance in all the aspects of emergency fire control room work and social things that teams do.

I supervise the Control Room Operators (CRO's) within the team. In charge of me is an Operation Manager (OM), they are allocated to different teams. My former OM Allison has gone on [REDACTED] leave and my new OM Kelly Mathews started in the role as of yesterday. I have worked for North West Fire Control for 3 years and 6 months, but prior to that I worked for Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service for 36 years. I joined the Fire Service in October 1978 when I was [REDACTED] so I think I have

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a fair idea of what my role involves. When I left Manchester Fire & Rescue I was a Fire Control Officer and I was in charge of a watch. They were called watches not teams, I applied for a similar role here but wasn't successful and didn't achieve that, so I picked up the team leader role which I currently do now.

The main role of a CRO is the receiving, handling and mobilising of emergency calls that come into the control room. They also have to deal with the administrative work that goes with that call, any associated action plans, informing other emergency services and they have a plan to follow depending on the incident type that they are dealing with.

At North West Fire Control we cover four (4) Fire & Rescue Services, Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumbria. The Control room is made up of a supervisory desk which overlooks all the pods, this is where all the CRO's are sat at their desks. The pod in the middle of the room is the Manchester pod and is the busiest Fire & Rescue Service. The pod to my left is Lancashire and the pod to my right covers two (2) Fire & Rescue Services Cheshire & Cumbria.

We have a buddy arrangement with London and Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service, but this only happens when we have an excessive amount of 999 calls coming into the control room that we can't handle. There are also certain factors that are taken into account, such as a call ringing for a number of minutes. We also a reciprocal arrangement that we can take London's overspill of 999 calls and vice versa and we are aware of that back up in case we get very busy. I think the buddy arrangement has been in place ever since I have been in North West Fire Control. I think it was agreed over the first few months to my knowledge. In the period that I have worked for Control I have never used the buddy arrangement. To my knowledge there are other Fire Services in the country that have this sort of arrangement as well. So on the 14th June 2017, on the night of the Grenfell Tower the buddy arrangement was used and it was the first time that I have used it. Teams have used this system on training days, in order to try out the facility, but I haven't done that yet, we were meant to have a training day last week but it got cancelled. On the 14th June the buddy system worked and we answered a numbers of calls from London and the activity in North West Fire Control was quiet so that helped as well. We didn't have that many calls to deal with so that allowed us to be freely available to deal with the calls we were getting from London.

When a 999 call comes into the control room, the audible sound starts to go off and there is also the visual sign of a red flashing light that alerts everyone in the room. There is also an automatic call distribution, so

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that call will be distributed equally around the room to the CRO's. Whoever gets the call will record an action the call, I also have a facility that allows me to monitor the call from my desk. On our desk there is a facility that allows us to monitor the call by pressing a certain button/link, so we can see what the call is about, we can also listen to the call, we can also see what the CRO is typing up on the incident log and we can also intervene should we feel we need to via the headset to make sure they have asked the caller the right questions. Another facility available to the us is that we can take over the call if it becomes problematic but we try not to do this and at times we walk over to the CRO's desk and assist them with the call. It also depends on the experience of the CRO taking the call as we don't always have the time to monitor every single call, so we may leave the more experienced operators to deal with their calls and only intervene if we see that there is a problem. There is also a facility available to them on their screens where they can request the assistance of a supervisor by pressing a button and this alerts us that they are asking for our assistance. We tend to focus on the lesser experience CRO's because they need the assistance more. We can also monitor the radio where the messages are coming in from, this is the link that we have with fire crews attending, we can also check and see that the message has been recorded correctly, the correct abbreviations have been used, the correct action following the request for assistance and whether the other emergency services have been informed. As a team leader you can do all this and watch the incident as it builds up.

We have a training package that allows us to deal with a FSG (Fire Survival Guidance) call, this allows the CRO to familiarise themselves with the type of questions that they can use in order to keep that person safe. The normal FSG that I am familiar with is a 'stay put policy' keeping them safe wherever they are, you question the caller to make sure it is safe and if it isn't safe what they can do to make it safe, by blocking a door, by getting everybody into the same room and opening windows to get fresh air in if it is safe to do. As a CRO you are trying to get a visual picture yourself to assist the caller on the other end of the line who is in trouble. We also have practical scenarios where we practice FSG calls, a colleague will pretend to be caller trapped and a CRO will deal with the call. We ask them for their name as this may calm them down, we give them our name to try and build a relationship a sort of bond that builds up through the call. I couldn't tell you if this is part of the training package, but the length of time spent on the line to the caller allows you to build a relationship with them. So it seems a natural way of dealing with the caller and trying to calm them down, they have confidence in you, so by calling them by their name they may feel assured, so in my opinion I feel it's good to ask their name and in turn give them your name. I have dealt with numerous FSG calls but not many in North West Fire Control. There is no limit to

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the amount of time you spend on an FSG call, with a lot of the calls you can ask the caller if they would like you to stay on the line with them, some may say yes, some may say no I'm fine, so you can't really specify how long you have to spend on the line to the caller during an FSG call. The 'stay put policy' only works if they feel safe where they are, so, as a CRO you are asking them lots of questions to establish if they feel safe, because the last thing the CRO would want to do is put them in danger or even more danger. As a CRO if you have made the caller feel safe and stopped the smoke from coming into wherever they are, because smoke is the one thing that could kill the person not the fire. So if you have a visual image in your mind of the scene, your instincts take over, you talk to them, tell them they are safe, try and keep them calm, tell them to get to the floor for fresh air as smoke rises and give them all the advice that you think is appropriate for that particular call.

We also have a facility that tells the CRO how far the fire appliance is from the scene and we can pass this information onto the caller. Once you have built up a relationship with the caller, you can then ask them if they can hear the fire appliance, can you see the blue light, can you hear them breaking in, can you hear the whistle as this means they are close to you. You just work with your instincts what you feel is best for that individual or that family.

The computer system that we use is called 'Intergraph'. It doesn't stand for anything it is just the name of the I software company. It is a mobilising system, emergency calls come into an 'ICCS' Integrated Communication Control System screen which is on the telephony side, so when you receive a fire call the Intergraph system presents you with a facility to fill in the address details, so you speak to the caller, you ask them for their address so you can validate this with the post code. A lot of the post codes are already entered onto the system and this makes it easier and the system will give you the correct address. You also add any additional information you want, the nature of the incident, any other information that they may offer if appropriate such as persons trapped, is it a road traffic collision or whatever it might be and then when you as the CRO are happy with everything and that address is validated into the system you save it. The system will then offer you a resource proposal an example being a building fire in Manchester, the system will propose four (4) fire appliances, the nearest four (4) fire appliances to the address you have validated will be sent to the scene. The appliances will then be mobilised following your actions. An appliance is another term that is used for a fire engine. Also attached to that incident will be an action plan, if you wanted a Station Manager to be mobilised to the scene and anything that is associated to that incident informing the other emergency services etc. will be added to the action plan. So

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the system has generated that for you to work through, the system also allows you to receive radio messages from the incident, it might be an informative message, assistance message and the CRO will make a record of this on their action plan and everything else will be recorded, so the incident is building up a log. The system also has a mapping system the AVLS Automated Vehicle Location System this is a satellite navigation so that we can see where the appliances are, the system has a facility that allows you to look at the running time of the appliances, so if an appliance may be nearer so for a category 1 or 2 incident it will tell you that you've sent these pumps to Manchester but actually there is one (1) that is nearer so its throwing proposals at you all the time. The system is interrogating the actions that you are putting on and making sure that the CRO has mobilised the nearest available appliances.

The CRO should always stick to the attendance that is offered and the action plan proposed by the system, should they want to change anything it is always done with the authorisation of a team leader. The system can be overridden by the CRO, they can change the proposals after authorisation from a team leader given to them by the system, as long as they can document their decisions as to why they have not accepted the proposals and can stamp and document this on the incident log. The system can manage additional resources so you can select manually what you want, the number of appliances, fire officers with certain skills, so you have a choice. Should the CRO's require the assistance of a team leader there is an assistance button on the system that they can use, this in turn highlights the computer screen of the team leader and it would say assistance required, so it's hard to miss if you are sat at your desk looking at the screen. On occasions the CRO's would wave their hands in the air and try to get our attention but you can generally tell by the tone of the CRO's voice and you would know they were having problems.

Training is an ongoing throughout the year and we have a training platform called PDR Pro, which is development programme where by the CRO's are fulfilling certain training requirements, they are being provided with and this is built up on a monthly basis. CRO's through the PDR Pro process can demonstrate to us that they are able to for example, mobilise an Urban Search & Rescue team to a building collapse. They may provide us with an actual example of a real incident where they've had to deal with it as their evidence or we would have a scenario based exercise and ask them to tell us what their actions would be and how they would mobilise appliances to deal with the incident. If we as team leaders are the happy with their knowledge and what is expected of them, their PDR Pro will be marked up in green and state that they have met their training requirements. They would also be observed on values and behaviours on how they work within a team, how they get on with other members of the team, if they assist them and all these things are taken into consideration when they are assessed.

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New recruits have to attend a standard four (4) week course, they start at the very beginning, the training programme gets them to a certain standard and at the end of the four (4) weeks they are allocated onto teams. They may have a development programme that they bring with them on things that they have not covered during their training so we as team leaders make sure that those topics get covered. They are then supervised for two (2) to three (3) weeks on team to see if they are grasping the concept of the emergency control room. If a team leader thinks that they are fulfilling their potential, fitting into the team and not feeling the pressure and are of an acceptable standard then they are allowed to deal with calls on their own rather than have someone sit next to them or standing over them monitoring their actions. There is also annual refresher training for everyone and this is back to basics trail certain topics that are not covered and this is valuable. Prior to the last refresher training they asked the staff what topics they wanted them to cover and this was included into the next refresher training day.

Fire Rescue Services organise an exercise to deal with Major Incidents and control will be a part of the exercise, depending on what they want to achieve. We had an exercise the other night, based on marauding terrorists, MTFA Marauding Terrorist & Firearms Type incident, it was meant to be testing the officer's responses etc. the control room was involved and it gave us an insight into the action plan for marauding terrorists where there were explosions. So there are quite a few exercises like that going ahead. So the exercise refreshes your knowledge on that particular type of incident and we work with them, sometimes we can take radio messages or we can give them chemical information or whatever the officer in charge requires. We do training in that respect and that exercise with the marauding terrorists was as a result of the Manchester bombing.

I am currently attached to team 1, the CRO's work a slightly different shift pattern to the team leaders as they work a mid-shift as well, that's when they come in at 12:00 and cover till 22:00 hours at night that's because the call volume's increase so we increase the staffing levels to accommodate that. As a team leader I only work days and nights, so I don't work the mid-shift. I work twelve (12) hours shifts, day shifts are from 7am to 7pm and night shifts area from 7pm to 7am, so I work 2 day shifts, 2 night shifts and then have four (4) days off and that is a constant pattern. On the night shift there are always a minimum of two (2) team leaders and the rest of the team are made up of CRO's. We do get an overlap with team 2 because they overlap during the mid-shift. We have had a few issues with the PDR Pro training platform but that is constantly under review but we are getting used to it, the more time you spend on it the more accustomed you get to it. I liked it when we just used paper copies, the PDR Pro is

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an electronic version isn't quite as visual to me. Its main function is to provide a training facility where the training is split over each month, so each operator knows that they have to cover certain areas within the month as possible and it is an ongoing individual driven training programme. They can do it whenever they have a bit of down time, during allocated training periods and they can also be completed whilst sat at their desks. Once completed they send it to their respective team leaders, my team will send me the evidence they have collated under a heading, I will then assess that evidence and decide if it fits the criteria for that particular requirement on that subject.

Initially we had teething problems with the 'Intergraph' system, fortunately things have got better and we are not having that many issues as we had at first. We wouldn't be able to get a hit on a London post code as our database doesn't stretch that wide, but we have our maps on the evacuation side to locate that post code. If we didn't have an address of the caller, we would have to question the caller and get a bit more to get further information and the map system is more like an A to Z.

On the 14th June 2017 I was on an on call shift, I was called in that night so I was covering from 22:00 until 07:00 hours in the morning and because I was making up the numbers for the other team as I was sat as a CRO for that shift, so I was taking 999 calls. It was quiet for the early part of the shift and then at around 02:00 in the morning it got busy. I was actually on my break when the buzzer sounded, this meant that everyone had to get back to their desks as it was an emergency. There was an over spill of calls coming from London, so when I got back into the control room I was briefed by Paula Craig the team leader about the calls and told that there was a high rise building on fire in London so that's all I knew at that point. I took a call from a lady that was looking at the tower, she said to me that she could see a fire in the distance, so I said to her that we had reports of a large fire at Grenfell Tower and asked her if that's what she was looking at, she said yes and I told her that the fire service was on their way so that was a pretty straight forward call. But by that time we had an address as someone else in the control room had taken a call and established the address. One (1) of our supervisors had also been in touch with London so we knew that it was a high rise building. One (1) of the supervisors had also nominated someone to collect the information of the calls, I think it was Natalie or Paula. We just gave them the log no verbally, and said that it was London incident which enabled them to view it on their screen. We had so many so when we had a few we were passing them back to London, we appreciated that they were busy. After that call I got a call from a gentleman called Sena, he said that he was in flat 133 on the 16th floor. I was on the line to him for about twenty (25) minutes, I was aware of other activity in the control room but I was

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concentrating on that call. He told me that there was smoke in his flat and he had already placed a cushion at the bottom of the door to stop the smoke from coming in. He said that the smoke was thick and his face was blackened by the smoke and also told me that his wife Hanife was in the flat with him. She was on the phone to a relative who had heard about the fire and called them. I immediately went onto the Fire Survival Guidance FSG based on the information he had given me smoke in the flat. I asked him if he was sure he had blocked the door, he said yes, but said that the smoke was still coming in. I asked him to look out of the window and if it was safe to open it, he said no because the fire was coming up on outside of the building, so I told him not to open the window. I told him to be calm, to stay in the room he was in, I introduced myself to him and got both their names from him. Because his wife was stood up talking on the phone I told him that she needed to get down on the floor to get fresh air. He said she was still on the phone to their daughter, she's talking to relatives. I told him that she was putting herself in danger by standing up and again told him to tell her to get down on the floor. I was also trying to reassure him by telling him that the fire engines were on their way and they know where they were. I was also telling him to breathe shallow, so he wouldn't be taking in lungfuls of the smoke that was in the flat and told him to tell his wife to do the same. He complied with all the instructions that I gave him and this went on for about twenty (20) minutes, he kept asking where the fire brigade was, again I reassured him as I got notification that they were there on the fourteenth (14) floor and they were trying to get up to the sixteenth (16) as quickly as possible. Because he was struggling with the smoke I said to him have you got any water, so I told him to go to the kitchen and get wet towels for both of them and I told them to breathe through that as it kind of filtered the smoke making breathing a little easier. I kept confirming that he done all the things I told him to do. It was then confirmed that we had to change tact from 'staying put' we were told by the London Fire Brigade 'that we had to get them out'. We had to get them through the internal staircase and down and at that exact time he said to me that he needed to get out of the flat. So I've now gone from telling him to stay calm, to telling him to get towels and wet them through and put them over your head and your wife's head, shoulders, anywhere you can to protect yourself and make your way out through your main door and down the internal staircase. He told me he was scared, I replied back and said you'll be fine something like that and said good luck. So I was on the line to him for about 25 minutes and at the end you can hear me on the tape saying 'oh my god'. I didn't know if they had survived, until last week when I found out that they both had survived and I was very pleased. When you are talking to them giving them FSG advice your adrenalin kicks in. While I was on the line I think a colleague Sam Dickson who was sat next to me listening to my call to Sena, he was intense because I

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remember seeing his face and he congratulated me at the end of the cal. He had Sky News on his phone, so I saw the image of the tower on fire and I hadn't understood the extent of the fire until I saw the images on his phone.

I think London Fire Brigade was communicating with Paula CRAIG & Natalie POMPONI who were the team leaders on the night shift by phone. When we were told that we had to tell them that they had to get out, it came as a bit of a shock to me as I had never done this before. I was still on the phone to Sena and it was about five (5) minutes before I told him to get out that I was given this information I think by Paula CRAIG. I took the call from Sena at around 02:10 and I spent about 25 minutes on the phone to him, so it may have been around 04:30 hours when I was told to tell them to get out of the building. There is a TV on in our control room and it is always on, but it wasn't on the news channel at the beginning of the shift. It was only after I had got off the phone to Sena that I looked at the screen and saw the pictures on the TV and knew then that there was a major incident in London due to the overflow of the calls, but didn't realise the extent of it. The TV is always on in the control room but the volume is always turned down to allow the operators to deal with the 999 calls.

After putting the phone down, I had to compose myself for a few minutes, it was very traumatic experience. I remember a fellow colleague Aisha still being on the phone talking to a caller, but the room seemed to come to a standstill for minute or so. I don't know if that was me and my emotions but it seemed to calm down a bit. We didn't get any further calls or we didn't get as many calls coming in from London. We were all in shock as we had seen the extent of the fire on Sky News and wondered how London Fire Brigade were coping with it. Towards the end of the shift we kind of all supported each other. I dealt with two (2) calls on the night, the one (1) from the lady looking on and the call with Sena and his wife.

In the control room we were monitoring the radio channel on the talk group, this channel had been given to the Grenfell fire so we were monitoring it from here. On the computer screen you can open up channels that are allocated to the various fire services in the country. The channel was being monitored by the two (2) team leaders Paula CRAIG & Natalie POMPONI and because the volume was loud everyone in the control room could hear what was being said on the channel. I couldn't tell you when we switched onto the radio channel but we could hear the communication between the control room and the incident commanders in London and we could hear things like, from control to commander we have just received a call and there are people on the balconies of floors at the top of the tower, the police helicopters have

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reported them but they are on the outside balcony, so we were wondering what the Incident Commander was going to do and how they were going to deploy their resources. In our control room we were sympathising with the situation because we've had busy situations before and knew how busy they were we knew that nearly every fire appliance in London was being used and we knew that they didn't have any aerial appliance that could reach the 23 floor and we couldn't believe that the fire had developed so quickly. So again we had an idea of what they were dealing with and we all just sat in awe listening to the channel. I know Paula CRAIG was in communication with the officer in charge of the control room in London, but I don't know what detailed information she was provided with or how in depth was the conversation that she had, or how long she was on the phone to them. I know after the event we did in touch and we had a collection for the London Fire Brigade and sent them a big hamper of chocolates. I think Paula has had more communication with the officer in charge since, just because of what happened as we are all in it together.

The flat fires that I have dealt with were fires that were contained to that floor or worse scenario may be a couple of floors but not an entire block of flats or 23 floors. I've had major building fires and things like but the fact that it was occupied, people were trapped and they potentially couldn't get out it just had a different emotion about it because people were involved. An empty building is an empty building, alright it is a property but there is no loss of life. It just had a different complexity and feel about it altogether. In the control room we have a 'mobile phone policy' phones are not allowed in the room during the hours of work, but we are a little bit relaxed as they may have family matters so they are allowed in now. There is Internet on the computer system and you are allowed to use it as long as it is related to your job, fire related and nothing else. We finished our shift at 07:00 hours in the morning and we all went home.

We have been offered counselling following the 14th June 2017. A few days later we got a call from an Operations Manager to say that there was a TRIM Trauma Incident Management facility which is like a critical incident debrief facility if you feel that you needed it. The team that I worked with on the night expressed that they would like to sit and talk about the night, so that was set up and I got invited together with all the staff that was on duty that night. The facility was there if you felt that you needed it.

Since the Grenfell Tower Fire the PDA (Pre-Determined Attendance) for high rise in Manchester has now got an aerial appliance on it immediately, but the action plan has remained the same. There were loads of buildings that were recognised to have been built like the construction of Grenfell but that was being dealt with by a team from the Fire & Rescue Service that they had nominated as contact officers. We haven't

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had any refresher training since the Grenfell incident, we have gone through the PDA with the CRO'Ss about the aerial appliance but nothing else has changed.

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