

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: OSBORNE, VANESSA

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

Occupation: FIRE FIGHTER

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This statement (consisting of 5 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: V OSBORNE

Date: 18/03/2018

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

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This statement refers to my account of the Grenfell Tower fire that took place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

I have been in Essex Fire & Rescue Service for 12 years, always in a Control Room environment. I joined as a Fire Control Operator and have been in that role ever since. A Fire Control Operator will take emergency calls / monitor the radio / mobilise appliances ensuring that there is fire cover across the county / ordering officers required at the scene / ordering on other agencies including the police / and monitoring the call as it progresses.

We have a TASK book (Technical Activities Skills & Knowledge), which is the recording system used by Essex Fire Service to monitor the development and maintenance of skills for the fire personnel. The TASK system applies to all operational staff. It is a development folder that we need to complete throughout the year to show competency in the role we perform. The evidence we need to provide covers across all subjects relating to the role, including accident reporting / reporting injuries / hazards / outside agencies and more.

We will fill out the day in which we completed the specific task, including the incident number from which it relates. This will then be reviewed and dated by our Supervisor.

When we complete the book, our Supervisor will review and sign the book. At the end of the financial year it will be sent to our TASK team who sign it off and will pass the details onto HR that we are

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competent in the role we perform. If the book is not complete, there may be a review as to why it has not been complete, and if any further development is required.

I have printed a copy of my TASK book from year 2017-2018. This gives an insight as to how it looks, and all the different areas that we need to provide evidence in. I exhibit this TASK book as VAO/1.

In addition to the TASK book, we should have an Advanced Call Handling course refresher course on a yearly basis. This will update and test us on new policies or procedures that are introduced. In Essex Fire & Rescue Service, our Training Officer role was removed, leaving no one to organise the training for us. I have not had a training course on mobilising since we moved to our new Control Room 3-4 years ago. Most of our training and experience is build on our daily role as the Fire Control Operator in the control room work environment.

Our Control Room is based in Kelvedon Park, Essex. We have four watches covering a 24/7 control room. Each Watch has eight members of staff, which includes:

- 1x FCO - Fire Control Officer
- 1x SFCOP - Senior Fire Control Operator
- 1x Leading Fire Control Operator
- 5x Fire Control Operators (call takers)

Some Watches may be understaffed and awaiting new recruits to complete their training.

Our minimum staffing level is five staff on a day shift (7am-7pm), and four staff on a night shift (7pm-7am). Of the minimum levels, it should include two staff members who are of higher rank. This will always ensure there is a Supervisor in the control room during break periods.

The Fire Control Officer will have overall supervision of the control room. The Senior Fire Control Operator will sit at the back of the control room and supervise the calls and incidents. Each Fire Control Operator will have a different task per shift, which includes admin / radio operator / call handling / availability / service messages.

When a call comes into the control room, a Fire Control Operator will answer the phone and say "Fire & Rescue Service, what is the address". This is the prompt the caller and obtain an address for us to mobilise appliances as quickly as possible. Once we confirm the address, we will ask the caller what the

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problem is and obtain details of the incident. We aim to gather as much information as possible from the caller to enable us to inform the crews we mobilise. Based on the details given by the caller, we will ask various further questions from the caller. The Fire Control Operator will then mobilise appliances to the incident and monitor the incident.

Fire Survival Guidance is given to a caller who is unable to get out of a building due to fire or smoke. If a caller is stuck inside, I will give advice to the caller to get away from the fire, open windows, ask where they are inside, keep down low, shut doors. The advice given can vary depending on the type of call but our main aim is to keep the person safe until rescue. A Supervisor will be there if needed, and they may monitor the call to ensure the control operator will ask everything that is required to pass onto crews and other agencies. We will all work as a team to ensure it runs smoothly. Our control room is quite small and everyone knows what is happening.

With regards to the 'Stay put' policy, it is advice given to a caller to remain in the property and await rescue from crews. As mentioned above, the advice can include staying low, stay away from the fire and open windows. In Essex, we do not have many high rise buildings, and there is not a note on our systems to prompt us around giving 'stay put' advice during a call.

In Essex, we do not get many overflow of calls from other Brigades. We are the backup Fire Service for Bedfordshire, and vice versa. If we answer a call on behalf of another Fire Service, we would create our own incident as if it was own call. If we cannot locate the address on our systems, we would add a note to the incident and manually write the address. We would ask details from the caller, then pass on all these details to the relevant Brigade. On our telephone system, we have all the direct lines for all the other brigades, which we will use to call their control rooms. I have taken a few calls from bordering Brigades, including London, but not on the severity of the Grenfell Tower fire. It is mainly around the borders of the Brigades where there is a split attendance.

I have no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower itself.

On the night on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017, I was on a night shift with White Watch in the Essex Fire & Rescue Service control room. We began our shift at 7pm. The below people were working:

- Officer in charge - Russ WHITE
- Supervisor - Katrina MARSHALL

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- Call Takers - myself / Sharon LANCASTER/ Jayde PALMER
- New recruit shadowing myself - Claire BANNISTER

Claire had completed her classroom based training, and this was her first night shift in the control room environment.

We will tend to split the Watch in half to accommodate breaks and maintain fire control at all times. It was myself / Russ / Claire on one half, with Katrina / Sharon / Jayde being the other half.

The evening itself was quite quiet and nothing was out of the ordinary. Myself, Russ and Claire went on a rest break at around midnight.

We came back into the control room between 2-2.30am. I remember Katrina and Sharon saying there was a large fire happening in London. Katrina said she has spoken to our night duty Divisional Officer Nigel DILLEY and informed him of the fire as they could not get hold of London Control Room and pass on the information from the calls we took. Sharon also mentioned she found the London Fire Brigade 'stay put' policy for high rise buildings, and that was the advice we were giving to callers, until we had spoken to London.

When I logged back on to the computer, myself and Claire looked on Google and found the images of the Grenfell Tower incident. These images showed a building engulfed in fire, completely alight. I don't think we had any television on in the control room at this time. In our control room, we have a large video screen that shows our global availability and list of stations across the county. It is supposed to show a map of all their MDT's and locations.

Russ / myself / Claire then took over from Sharon / Katrina / Jayde. I took over from Sharon on the radio, and Russ took over from Katrina on the supervisors desk.

At 02:32 hours, I took a phone call from our DO Nigel DILLEY and he informed me that he had passed through all our previous call details to the Metropolitan Police in Hendon. This included flat number / floor numbers / caller numbers. He passed me the contact number for the police control room to update them if needed. Nigel gave me the Police CAD number as 801 of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

A few minutes later, Russ WHITE called the Metropolitan Police control room and they told Russ that they were now advising all residents to make their way to the fire escape. Russ then updated our incident

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log with the details of the new advice, and informed me that we would be telling any other callers to make their way to the fire escapes.

Over the next 30-40 minutes, I remember Russ was on the phone to callers and other brigades. Myself and Claire were continuing to trail through the news, watching it, trying to figure out what was going on.

At 03:13 hours, I took a call from Surrey Fire & Rescue Service. The male operator told me that London Fire brigade were now advising people to wrap themselves in wet clothes and to get out, as there was no chance of a rescue. London Fire Brigade had asked Surrey to pass this information on to us. I then updated Russ WHITE and updated our incident log with these details.

At 03:28 hours, I took a 999 call from a caller who was possibly inside Grenfell Tower on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. The number that called us was 07 [REDACTED] 549, and came through to one of our phone lines in the control room. Our fire service area code is 01376. I recall Russ had previously spoken to a male on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor who called us from the same number, which is why I believed the caller was still inside. During the call, I did not hear any voices, but was just hearing background noises sounding like children crying and rustling, as though the phone was in a pocket or left on the side. I was trying to speak to the caller but could not hear anything. After a few seconds, the line went dead.

At 03:42 hours, I took another call an emergency roamer phone, which does not show the phone number that is calling. The BT Operator will pass it through as an 'emergency roamer' call. The female caller was calling from Vincent House, a block of flats opposite the tower.

The female caller said that there were people stuck on the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> floor of Grenfell Tower calling for help. I took all the information about the people that were on the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> floor and ended the call. At 03:45 hours, I called London Fire Brigade control room on the direct line and passed on the details that the female caller had just given to me. There may have been some delay in London answering the phone, but cannot remember how much of a delay.

That was our last involvement in the Grenfell Tower fire, and the Essex Control Room did not receive any more phone calls.

The remainder of the shift was as normal, with very little incidents going on across the county.

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We finish our night shift at 7am. At the end of the shift, we always do a handover to the oncoming watch. We all do handovers to whoever is taking over from our positions. Whoever came onto our position, I would have passed on details of the calls we took on behalf of London in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire. Russ WHITE would have completed an extensive handover to the oncoming supervisor.

After the incident, we made notes in relation to the calls we took and made in the Essex Control Room. I have referred to these notes in this statement to refresh my memory. I exhibit these notes as VAO/2.

The night of the Grenfell Tower is beyond any previous experience of mine. I have taken calls from people trapped in buildings before, but not to this level. It was very difficult to contact London control room on the night of the fire due to the severity of the incident. Every control room would have been in a similar position.

I have nothing further to add at this time.

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