

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: HEPWORTH, SIMON

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

Occupation: POLICE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 2 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 HEPWORTH

Date: 07/11/2017

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

I am Inspector 6812 Simon John HEPWORTH of West Yorkshire Police, currently seconded to the National Police Air Service (NPAS) as Operations Centre Manager. I have been in this role since 7th March 2016.

The NPAS Operations Centre ('Ops Centre') is sited at Admin Block 2, West Yorkshire Police Headquarters, Laburnum Road, Wakefield, WFI 3QF. It is staffed 24 hours per day, seven days per week, year round. The function of the Ops Centre is to liaise with individual police forces via their control rooms, accept or decline requests for deployment of NPAS aircraft, liaise in turn with aircrews at NPAS bases across England and Wales in order to deploy the aircraft, and then provide a flight-following service. The Ops Centre staff comprise a team of up to five Flight Despatchers supervised by a Flight Duty Officer. All these personnel are Police Staff employees of West Yorkshire Police, seconded to NPAS.

In June 2017, at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire, there was a secondary control room at NPAS Lippitts Hill base, which was staffed by employees of the Metropolitan Police Service, none of whom were seconded to NPAS. Usually one or two members of MPS staff would be working in the control room at Lippitts Hill at any one time.

Deployment of NPAS aircraft to provide air support to local police forces conforms with written Standard Operating procedures (SOPs). The decision-making process is structured as follows:

1. Each request for deployment to an incident is assessed by the Flight Despatcher for the level of threat, harm and risk that incident represents. This is to ensure that the aircraft are deployed to

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incidents where their attendance is most necessary. If the request for deployment does not meet the necessity threshold, then the Flight Despatcher will tell the requesting force that it has been declined, and will write their rationale on the NPAS log system ('Storm') in accordance with the National Decision-Making Model.

2. Once the necessity criteria has been met, the task is assessed for viability, in other words, can the aircraft and crew contribute positively to the mitigation of the threat through use of equipment and training? As above, the Flight Despatchers make a decision to accept or decline the request on the basis of its viability.
3. If the request is accepted as necessary and viable, the Flight Despatcher will contact the most appropriate NPAS base and pass details of the task to the duty crew. The crew will then deploy to the incident, unless there is a reason why they cannot safely and legally do so. As an organisation certificated by the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct Police Air Operations, NPAS must comply with all applicable aviation legislation, which covers such factors as weather, aircraft serviceability, crew fatigue and duty hours.
4. Once the aircraft takes off as deployed, the Ops Centre undertakes a flight-following procedure. This is because NPAS aircraft operate primarily outside controlled airspace and there is a legal requirement for their safe operation to be monitored. This is specifically for purposes of air safety and entails regular checks, usually every twenty minutes, which require a positive acknowledgement by the crew to confirm a status known as Ops Normal'.
5. Staff at Lippitts Hill control room are able to monitor Airwave Talkgroups in the MPS area and read the MPS CAD incident logs. This enables them to recognise emerging incidents and consider early deployment of the Lippitts Hill-based aircraft, subject to the MPS agreeing. This procedure can save valuable time in deployment. Once deployed by Lippitts Hill, the aircraft is subject to flight-following by the Ops Centre at Wakefield.
6. Once at or approaching the scene of the incident, the aircrew will make radio contact with the local police force via an agreed Airwave Talkgroup (radio channel). Any tactics and specific direction is communicated between the incident commander and the NPAS crew in this way. Neither the Ops Centre nor the Lippitts Hill control room staff give any tactical direction to the crew as these are strictly the remit of the local force incident commander. Staff at the Ops Centre do not have access to local police force radio or computer systems other than those necessary for the

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deployment process, so are not able to monitor the progress of incidents unless information is sent to them by the local force.

I attach as Exhibit SJH1 a document titled 'NPAS Deployment to Grenfell Tower', which contains the details of all individual aircraft deployments to the incident. This includes summaries of information on the NPAS incident log detailing aircraft and crew deployment times and lists of the specific aircraft and crew members deployed.

I can state categorically that NPAS Ops Centre does not receive calls from members of the public in connection with ongoing incidents.

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