

This transcript has been produced for the DARG data session to be held on 19 March 2025. The source of the data is the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Please do not copy or distribute the data without permission – thank you (m.j.ovens@warwick.ac.uk).

The excerpt is taken from an oral hearing which formed part of a public inquiry into a catastrophic fire in a residential tower block, Grenfell Tower in June 2017, as a result of which 72 people lost their lives. The witness is a fire brigade Control Room Operator who was on duty on the night of the fire. She is being questioned by a barrister (pseudonym “John”), with occasional interventions from the Inquiry Chairman (“Timothy”). Immediately before this section of questioning, the Control Room Operator had spoken of her discomfort with the ‘stay-put policy’ (a set of conventions influencing building design and fire-fighting strategy, according to which it is normally safest for residents to stay in their own flats unless they are directly affected by the fire). This was because of her personal knowledge of an earlier fire at the Lakanal House tower block, when residents were advised to stay put, but firefighters were unable to rescue all of them.

1 Joh Em (.) then you (0.2) also ↓say (0.4) >in the same
2 paragraph w- I have read it to you that you would assure
3 the caller tha’ the firefighters know exactly where they
4 wer- where they are (0.7) ((clears throat)) (0.5) um (0.3)
5 and you say tha- ‘t’s to be their own personal decision as
6 to whether they .hhh decided to stay or go°< (1.1) was that
7 (.) your own personal (0.6) ↑practice (.) ↓at the time of
8 the Grenfell Tower fire (1.3) that you would always assure
9 the call[ers?]
10 Wit [I ↑couldn’t (.) ↓I didn’t feel I could decide ↓for
11 them
12 Joh °Ri::ght°
13 (2.3)
14 Wit An’ I know I was alone in that ((nodding)) but I just could
15 not ((shaking head/nodding))
16 (2.3)
17 Joh When you say I would assure the caller that the fire
18 fighters know exactly where they were (0.9) w- was that er
19 a p- (0.3) was tha’ an invariable practice of yours at the
20 time you would always say [they know where you are]
21 Wit [I hope so]
22 (0.5)
23 Joh Right (0.5) w- w- would [there] al- (.) would there always
24 Wit [bu-]
25 Joh be a a an information basis for giving that assurance
26 (2.3)
27 Wit Did I I always passed the information on (0.7) to the fire
28 ground=
29 Joh =°Yeah° (0.6) but when you assured callers that the

30 firefighters know exactly where they were as you say (0.9)
31 [would you]
32 Wit [I ho-] I tried to I (.) hoped I did °bu-°=
33 Joh =An' my question is (.) would you would you give that
34 advice even though you weren't (0.4) you didn't have any
35 factual basis for knowing (.) that the firefighters knew
36 where they callers were
37 Wit Well th- the information was being passed ↑over to the the
38 ↑fire ground (.) so
39 (1.1)
40 Joh D- does that mean that you ass- you would always assume
41 (0.6) that the firefighters would know where they were
42 (0.6) [as soon as the information] was passed over to the
43 Wit [i- ((inaudible))]
44 Joh [fire ground]
45 Wit [↑Well I was] (.) ↑yes ((nodding with gaze directed at
46 counsel))
47 (0.5)
48 Joh °Right° (1.2) [even after]
49 Tim [Well can] I can I just ((clears throat))
50 (0.4) wh- what I'm understanding from what you're saying
51 is that whatever information you got you passed on to (0.6)
52 the fire ground=
53 Wit =Mm
54 Tim ↑Is is that what you are intending to ↑say=
55 Wit =Mm
56 Tim Now ((turns gaze to John)) does ↑that meet your question or
57 are you [putting a ↓different question]
58 Joh [Not quite >no it doesn't] .h but a-
59 assuming the information was passed on to the fire ground
60 58 would you al- would you also then go on to assume it had
61 been ↑acted on by the by the crews< s- so [the] crews
62 Wit [↑Yeah]
63 Joh were actually going up (.) to rescue [peo]ple?
64 Wit [↑Yeah]
65 Joh °You would°
66 Wit Mm
67 Joh and is that so e:ven a:fter (.) th- your own personal
68 lesson learnt at Lakanal that the assumption that people
69 would always be rescued (0.7) er (.) >°if I've understood
70 this right< (.) er (.) that it wasn't necessarily correct°
71 Wit >Well you've ↑always got to hope they're gonna be
72 res↓cued.<
73 Joh >So it's a< hope
74 Wit °↑Yes° ((nodding with gaze directed at counsel))
75 (1.4)

76 Joh °↓Hm° (1.4) now
77 (4.0)
78 Tim Well again I'm sorry to keep interrupting you but ((counsel
79 name)) ((turns gaze to witness)) (1.2) #uh# (0.7) am I
80 right in understanding that you passed on the information
81 (1.0) you assumed that it would be acted upon (0.8) and you
82 hoped that the action would be suc↑cessful=
83 =↓Yes
84 But (0.3) in the circumstances you couldn't (0.4) tell
85 whether it would be [or ↑not]
86 Wit [↑No no] (.)↓no
87 Tim An- you may or may not have been told whether it was or
88 not=
89 Wit =°Mm°
90 (1.0)
91 Tim #uh# ((turning gaze to John)) °all ↑right°
92 (1.1)
93 Joh ↑>Yes< (0.5) yes (0.2) ((nodding)) you may not have been
94 told whether it was or not bud in those circumstances
95 (0.3) we'll look at some examples in i- in due cou:irse (.)
96 bud i- just generally (0.3) °I want to get a feel for your
97 pra- your your h- your° pra:ctice (1.1) you would ↑give the
98 as↓urance (.) is this right b- because you (.) you knew the
99 information was passed to the incident ground you hoped that
100 it would be acted on (0.5) have I (.) have I summarised this
101 fairly (0.3) because if I haven't (0.4) somebody will
102 complain (0.6) ah but you didn't kno:w that the crews were
103 there or on their way (.) when telling people (0.6) erm
104 [that ((inaudible))]
105Wit [I ↑knew they were on] ↓scene bu- (0.2) erm
106Joh °Right°
107 (2.2)
108Wit So (0.4) that was all we could ↑do at that point (.) I
109 thought
110Joh °Okay° (.) I'm just trying to get a feel fo:r wh- when you
111 say in your statement I would a- assure the caller that
112 the fire fighters know exactly where they we:re (0.8) I'm
113 just trying to get a feel for how (0.9) how confident you
114 were (0.9) that that was ↑actually happening (0.2) when you
115 gave (0.4) °↑assurances to callers°
116Wit Well (1.0) I don't definitely know (.) but (.) uh because
117 I'm not on scene but er
118Joh °Right°
119Wit that was what the expectations w-
120 [((inaudible))] ((nodding))
121Joh [>That's what the expectation was all right°<]