THE CORONER: Thank you. Good morning everybody.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, madam.

THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Just in terms of housekeeping matters before the jury come in, I had invited representations on whether or not Mr Nuhu should be called or read and Mr Walsh has suggested that his second and third statements be read but not the rather longer first statement. In the light of that suggestion, I have revisited the matter and I now, on reflection, agree with him that that would be a sensible way forward. I indicated that by email, but only half an hour or so ago.

THE CORONER: I'm sorry?

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: By email, about half an hour or so ago, I circulated his suggestion and said that I now agreed with it, but I suggest perhaps we give everybody another 24 hours to say what their view on that is.

THE CORONER: Okay, that would be helpful. If you could indicate your views on that, that would be helpful. Thank you. Yes.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The witnesses to be called today are
firstly Mr Aveling and secondly Mr Smettem. Mr Atkins has just introduced himself to Mr Aveling. Mr Atkins will be calling both of the witnesses.

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: We thought that we could use the opportunity for me to read some statements whilst he's doing that. I was going to read the statements of Kay Broom, page 85 in the Rule 37 bundle, and Jason Kirby, page 89 in the same bundle.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Later today we will read the statements of Trevor Chapman, page 264 in the bundle of witnesses originally due to be called, and Simon Chapman, page 348 in the same bundle.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, all right. Thank you very much. Does anyone want to raise any matters before the jurors come in? Thank you very much. Could we invite them in, please. If the sun coming through the windows is troubling anyone we can close the curtains. It's a shame to shut it out.

(In the presence of the Jury)

THE CORONER: Good morning, members of the jury. We're going to begin this morning with Mr Maxwell-Scott reading a statement, and then we'll go on to evidence from Mr Aveling and Mr Smettem. Yes.
MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I'm going to start by reading the witness statement of Kay Broom, a firefighter. The statement is dated 12 August 2009 and reads as follows:

"I am employed by London Fire Service and have been a serving firefighter for six years. I am based at Bethnal Green fire station, which is called F26. I am an operational firefighter attached to Blue Watch. During the interview/statement I will be referring to a pack of photographs and maps provided by the LFB (London Fire Brigade) and exhibited as SB/1.

"On Friday, 3 July 2009, I was working a night shift at Bethnal Green. A night shift is 1800 hours until 0900 hours the next day. I have no previous knowledge of Lakanal House and have never been there, to my recollection, in any professional capacity. My crew for the night shift consisted of crew manager Paul Veasey and firefighters Dave Egan, Jason Kirby and Gareth Jones. Our duties that evening was to staff the fire rescue unit.

"The fire rescue unit has extended duration breathing apparatus. The machine has no water or ladders. The primary role is search and rescue. My responsibility was the communication for extended duration breathing apparatus."
"Our crew was mobilised at 18.20 and the machine was mobile at 18.23. We had a call out/shout to a 15 pump, five persons reported. This means that 15 machines were at a fire and persons had been reported as believed trapped in the fire. I was in full protective kit and the EDBA was on board. We made our way to Lakanal House in Camberwell. We arrived at 1840 hours and the machine was situated outside the town hall.

"When we arrived we were told by to wait by the machine whilst Crew Manager Paul Veasey went to establish what was to be done. After about ten minutes Paul returned and we put our EDBA on. We then walked a couple of hundred metres until we arrived at the BA muster area. The muster area was behind some garages close to the scene in a cul-de-sac junction with Dalwood Street. We were told to wait, which we did, until we were assigned a responsibility.

"At 2020 hours we were told to go to the bridgehead on the 3rd floor of Lakanal House (the scene), Havil Street. The bridgehead is a forward operating position usually located two floors below the fire from where BA crews are committed into the incident.

"As I approached the scene I looked up and noticed dark smoke coming out of the floor on one of the higher levels. I also saw a black individual at the very top
level shouting down and walking around that level. I couldn't hear what was being said.

"As a crew of five we entered the flats and used the internal stairs to climb to the bridgehead on the 3rd floor. We were then briefed as to what duties to perform by the entry control officer. We were told to go to the 11th floor, turn right on the landing and go to the fourth flat on the left side of the corridor and fight the fire within the flat. At this stage, we split and I was crewed with firefighters Egan and Kirby. The three of us then walked up the internal stairs to the 11th floor. There was no visibility issues on the stairs or on arrival at the 11th floor. There was no fire or smoke, as by the time we arrived the fire was out. There were a few hot spots en route.

"On arrival there were a number of watch managers. As a crew we had started up our EDBA on the 3rd floor and we continued to use it. We went right onto the landing/corridor and along to the fourth door. The corridor was extensively damaged by fire and smoke. The walls and ceilings were all black and badly damaged and wires and cables were hanging down.

"When we got to the fourth door a number of fire crews came out. Firefighter Kirby went upstairs and I went in the downstairs bedroom. The flat is two storey
and upside down. By that I mean the bedrooms and
bathroom are on the lower floor and the living room and
kitchen the upper floor.

"Firefighter Egan went into the bathroom. He came
out and told me there was a body in the bathroom.
I went to the corridor and got a watch manager. The
lower level of the flat didn't appear damaged by the
fire and no real smoke damage either. There is a little
door that leads from the bedroom under the stairs and
out to the corridor to another little door. As a result
of this, there is a void under the stairs. It is
designed as a cut through escape route. The fire had
badly damaged the stairs and looked as though it had
come through the little door leading from the corridor
and up the stairs, burning the stairs badly and
collapsing the stairs at the top.

"I took the watch manager into the flat and told him
there was a body in the bathroom. He then went into the
bathroom and a short while later came out and said that
there were two bodies in the bathroom. We were told to
take the bodies from the bathroom to clean air and
assess for signs of life. Firefighter Egan was already
in the bathroom. I then followed Firefighter Kirby
toward the bathroom. Kirby went into the bathroom and
took hold of the head of a black woman. I then took
hold of her feet. We then manoeuvred the body out of the bathroom into a bedroom where the air was cleaner. Firefighter Egan came out of the bathroom behind us, carrying a young mixed race girl, and went into the other bedroom.

"Myself and Firefighter Kirby checked vital signs for signs of life. Having both checked, it was clear that there was no signs of life. We were told to cover the body with a curtain that was close by, which we did. I then left the bedroom and went to the doorway of the other bedroom to see if Firefighter Egan needed help. When I looked into the bedroom, I saw Firefighter Egan and a watch manager near a young mixed race girl. It was clear to Firefighter Egan that there appeared to be no signs of life, as this is what he told me. I handed Firefighter Egan a cover from the first bedroom and Firefighter Egan covered her.

"We were then told to search the rest of the flats and went upstairs as a crew. We searched the rest of the flat in details and found no other casualties. We then searched all the other flats on that level and ended up back at the flat opposite the initial flat I had entered. Stairs were missing from the flat opposite so I went to the initial flat to recover a ladder to use in the opposite flat.
"As I entered the initial flat, I saw two paramedics. One was in the bedroom with the child and the other at the doorway of the bedroom. Neither were wearing BA kit.

"I recovered the ladder and continued with my search of the opposite flat. We then went up a level to enter and search the upstairs levels of the flats. At the top of the stairs we turned right and went out onto a fire escape balcony. We entered the first door and went into a living room area. The room was very badly fire and smoke damaged. The fire had been extinguished but there was a small amount of smoke in the room. As soon as I entered together with Firefighter Kirby, we saw a woman lying on the floor with her head towards the door/window area. Firefighter Kirby checked for signs of life but found none. The woman was very badly burned. I told Firefighter Egan, who was on the balcony still, to inform a senior officer. Myself and Firefighter Kirby then continued searching the flat and found no further casualties. Firefighter Egan returned and informed us that they were already aware of this casualty. We continued to search the rest of the flats on this level but they were empty.

"As a crew, the three of us then left the flat search and went to the bridgehead on the 3rd floor. We
removed our BA masks and debriefed. We then went to the
ground floor and met other crews. We went back to the
garage area to the EDBA muster area and removed our BA
kit. We subsequently went back to our machine. A short
while later we left the scene at 2238 hours and returned
to our station at Bethnal Green."

That's the end of the statement.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

Witness statement of JASON KIRBY read

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I will then read the statement of Jason
Kirby, another firefighter, dated 22 July 2009. The
statement reads as follows:

"I am the above named person and this is my
statement about a fire at Lakanal House, Sceaux Gardens
estate, Camberwell, on Friday, 3 July 2009.

"I am currently employed as a firefighter and have
been for over 12 years. I am currently on blue watch
based at Bethnal Green fire station. On the above date
I was the designated driver of the fire rescue unit
call sign F266 for the first night duty, the hours of
1800 to 0900 the following day. After the role call, as
a designated driver I went to my appliance and carried
out the normal vehicle checks and the testing of my
extra duration breathing apparatus equipment (EDBA). At
about 1820 hours, the fire call bells sounded and I went
to the watch room teleprinter to establish the address of the shout. The fire call message details the nature of the incident and the address, including the appliances attending. The message was that there was a 15 pump fire.

"Myself and the crew of our appliance then began to make our way to Peckham with the blue lights illuminated and the sirens sounding. Whilst en route I could hear various radio traffic informing the various appliances that were attending where to RVP. About 20 minutes later we arrived at the RVP, which was Peckham road. The crew of the appliance began to prepare for operations, awaiting the return of Crew Manager Veasey, who had gone to the control unit to book in. I was then getting my fire equipment on and was told that we needed to get our EDBA on.

"We then went to the BA holding area at the rear of Lakanal House, where the garage area is."

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: I'm terribly sorry, could I just interrupt? I've managed to kick our monitor out and the power's gone.

THE CORONER: I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Sorry, I've just managed to kick out the power source, so I was just wondering if we could hang on just a moment while I duck under the desk.
THE CORONER: Let me know if you need any help with that.


THE CORONER: Are you reconnected?

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Sorry about that.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, do you just want to start at
the beginning of that paragraph. Sorry, how long ago
did you lose it?

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Only about five seconds, sorry.

THE CORONER: All right. Well then, just start at the
bottom of page 89 with:

"We then went to the BA holding area ..."

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes:

"We then went to the BA holding area at the rear of
Lakanal House where the garage area is. Initially we
were instructed to remain in this area. We remained
here for what seemed a long time. I could still see
smoke coming from the rear of the block.

"At about 2020 hours we were informed that a crew ofive in BA equipment was required to make their way to
the bridgehead on the 3rd floor. We went to the 3rd
floor and awaited further instruction. Soon after, we
were told that two crews were required, so we split into
a crew of three and another of two. I was part of the
four-man crew and we were told to make our way to the
11th floor to follow the fire hose into the fourth flat
on the left-hand side. We were briefed to continue with
the firefighting.

"We entered the flat and I could see the fire hose
going up the stairs. The hallway wasn't blazing in fire
at this time but I couldn't tell if the upstairs was
still on fire. Fireman Dave Egan was with me and he
told me that there were two casualties in the bathroom.
At some point I believe it was Firefighter Broom
informed a senior officer that there were two people in
the bathroom. Although I didn't know the flat number at
the time, I now believe this was flat 81.

"A senior officer then entered and went into the
bathroom. Firefighter Broom and I then entered the
bathroom after being instructed by the senior officer.
We then pulled the body of an adult female out of the
bathroom into a bedroom opposite. The lady wasn't
breathing. We rolled her onto her back and tried to
tilt her head back and open her mouth to open the
airway. Unfortunately her jaw was locked solid and
I was unable to do this. At this point there were no
signs of life and it was obvious the lady was dead.
I believe that the child had been removed by
Firefighter Egan into another room. I then laid
a blanket over the lady to cover her.

"We were then instructed to carry out a search of
the remaining rooms to ensure there were no more casualties. Whilst searching other flats, it was necessary to use a section of short extension ladder to assist us in bridging a stairwell in order to carry out the search. I never saw the lady again. She was fully clothed when I removed her from the bathroom to the bedroom.

"It was then suggested that we could obtain access to the upper floors via the outside balconies. We went back along the corridor, through a security door and onto a small narrow balcony. We then went back along to search the flats on the other side of the block. I went into another flat. The number I do not know. As I entered the living room, I saw an adult female, apparently dead, lying on her front/side, lying on the left-hand side of her face. This lady was only about three to five feet from the living room door that leads to the balcony. Initially, I thought it was a black lady but I didn't touch her. I then told Firefighter Broom what I had found and a senior officer was called. It was obvious the lady was dead and there was nothing we could do to help her.

"The senior officer then entered the flat with a member of the LAS and said they were aware of the lady. I asked if the rest of the flat had been searched
and was told it had. The flat was still burning in a small pocket so I picked up a hose and extinguished it. I then left the flat after having a cursory search just to make sure there were no other casualties in the premises. We then searched maybe one more flat as we were preparing to leave the flats, but I cannot be sure. We did as much as we could in the very difficult circumstances before returning to the bridgehead as a crew of three. We then booked out from the entry control.

"Prior to leaving, we debriefed the other crews waiting to enter the block and the sector commander of the bridgehead. We then left the block and we returned to the BA holding area, where we took off our BA equipment and had some water to rehydrate. Some time around 2200 hours we left the incident and returned to Bethnal Green fire station.

"The lady and the child that was discovered in the bathroom I never saw again. I never saw the other lady I found in the living room again. I am now aware that they tragically died in this incident and have seen their pictures in the press and papers."

And that's the end of that statement.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Yes. The plan now is we hear from Mr Aveling?
MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: It is, if he's ready, yes.

THE CORONER: Yes. Mr Clark, would you mind seeing if

Mr Aveling is ready? If not, we'll have a short break.

(Pause) Yes, is that Mr Aveling? Good morning. Do

come forward. Thank you for coming.

ANDREW AVELING (affirmed)

THE CORONER: Mr Aveling, thank you very much for coming.

Do sit down.

A. Hello.

THE CORONER: Good morning. Please, if you could keep your

voice up that would be very helpful. There are a couple

of microphones in front of you but the sound is quite

difficult in this room.

A. Okay.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Atkins, who is

standing, is going to ask questions on my behalf, and

then there may be questions from others. It may seem

a little artificial, but if you could direct your

answers across the room towards the members of the

jury --

A. To those? Okay.

THE CORONER: -- who are sitting opposite you, that will

help them to hear your evidence and also keep you close

to the microphone.

A. Sure, okay.
Questions by MR ATKINS

MR ATKINS: Could you please tell the court your full name?

A. Yes. Andrew Christopher Aveling.

Q. Mr Aveling, is it correct that you were the tenant of flat 79?

A. Yes.

Q. On the 11th floor of Lakanal House?

A. Yes.

Q. Is it also right that you first became a tenant in around about 1993/1994?

A. Yes.

Q. Mr Aveling, if I may, I'm going to ask you questions in three sections this morning. The first section will be to do with fire safety information that may have been provided to you and your knowledge of the layout of Lakanal House, the second section will deal with some particular events that happened during the years that you were a tenant between 1994 and 2009 and the third section will be to do with the events on the day of the fire in July 2009. We'll take it in that way.

Can I begin then, please, with the first topic, which is fire safety information and your knowledge of the layout of the building. Just to explain, you are one of about ten residents of Lakanal who are going to
be giving evidence to the jury, and we are asking all of
them essentially the same questions in order to build up
a picture of what those who lived at Lakanal knew about
the building and what information had been provided to
them. So at this stage I'm not going to be asking you
about what happened on the day of the fire; I'm going to
be asking you about your knowledge before that date.
Does that make sense?
A. That makes sense, yeah.
Q. To begin with, please, I'll show you two documents, and
what we would like to know in each case is whether, to
the best of your recollection, you have ever seen them
before, whether you recognise them. I'm going to ask
Mr Clark first of all to hand you page 1050 of the
advocates' bundles, which is in file 3. I'll just put
that on the screen for the jury as well. (Handed)
This is a four-page leaflet which was prepared by
the London Fire Brigade. If you could just take your
time to look through it from page 1050 to 1053, and then
let us know, once you've done that, whether you think
it's a document that you've seen before.
A. No, I haven't seen this before.
Q. Thank you. Could we then please go just a few pages
further on to page 1054. This one is two pages long,
and it's the same question, please. Just take your
time, have look at it and let us know if you think
you've ever seen that document before.

A. No, I haven't seen that.

Q. In the time that you were a tenant at Lakanal House, had
you for any reason ever looked at the
London Fire Brigade website for advice about fire
safety?

A. No.

Q. Do you recall ever receiving what's known as a home fire
safety visit? That's when some firefighters would come
to your flat to give you some advice about fire safety.

A. No, that never happened.

Q. Could I show you a third document, then, please. This
time it's at page 1068 in the same bundle. If you look
in the bottom right-hand corner, there's a number 9 in
brackets.

A. Yeah.

Q. A little to the left of that is a number 27 --

A. Yes.

Q. -- which is the page number from the original document.
So what we've done is to take out that page and the two
pages after it from a longer document.

A. Okay.

Q. It's the same question as before, please. If you just
look at those three pages and then let us know if you
think you've ever seen them before.
A. No, I've never seen these before.
Q. Thank you. You can put the bundle to one side for
a moment. I'll move on now to ask you about your
knowledge of some of the features of the building, the
layout of the building. We've heard already that at the
time of the fire in 2009 you had been a tenant there for
about 15 years.
A. Yes.
Q. Did you know how many flats there were in total?
A. Not an exact figure, but -- no. No, I mean -- what, in
the whole building?
Q. In the whole building, did you have an impression of
roughly how many flats there were?
A. Well I was number 79 and I was on the -- I had the 11th
and 12th floor, so I'd imagine there could have only
been up to about ninety-something.
Q. Were you aware that all of the flats in the building had
essentially the same layout inside?
A. Yes.
Q. If somebody had asked you how they could get to a flat
in the building which you had never been to before -- so
for example, if they said to you, "I'd like to go to
flat 40; how do I do that?" -- would you have been able
to tell them how to get there?
Q. If you met somebody outside the building, could you help them?
A. Yes, I would just say -- well, I wouldn't know exactly, but I would just say it would be a low floor number and you'd just have to come out of the elevator and look left or right at the numbers. It would be guesswork, really.

Q. If I just show you this photograph. It's number 7 in tab 13. That's a photograph of the lift lobby on the ground floor in the building. Do you remember that?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you see on the wall just where the cursor is, between the two lifts, there's a sign?

A. Yes. Yes, but that's --

Q. If we go on the next picture --

A. You see, the original sign was written in -- in big -- in the actual tiles themselves, and then that was -- then they renovated that area and put that sign up. But that sign wasn't there immediately when that -- when they'd done the renovation.

Q. Can you remember when that was, roughly, that the sign was added?

A. No, I can't remember.

Q. Before the sign was put there, you say that the numbers
were in the tiles themselves?

A. On the tiles.

Q. Was that in the same place?

A. Yeah, well, it was just on the back wall opposite the elevator. And they did have signs, but it was just -- it was -- either they would fall down or they were experimenting.

Q. You told us earlier that you would have said to somebody: "Go up to the floor and then look to see which numbers were there." I've just put on the screen this time photograph number 11, which shows one of the doors leading from the lift lobby into one of the corridors.

A. Yeah.

Q. If we look to the left of the door there's a metal panel with a number of buttons there. Is that what you were referring to, that somebody could look at that list of numbers?

A. Yes, that list of numbers, yeah. And also they had the -- when you came out of the elevator on that -- on the chosen floor, it would be -- there would be a sign in front of you.

THE CORONER: Mr Aveling, you are speaking away from the microphone.

A. Oh, sorry.

THE CORONER: It's a little bit difficult to hear you.
Perhaps you could just move the microphones a little closer.

A. Over here like this?

THE CORONER: Yes, that's fine, and if you could try and remember to speak across the room as well, that would help, thank you.

MR ATKINS: Sorry, so there would be a sign as you came out of the lifts in front of you which would tell you which flats were on that floor?

A. Yes.

Q. If we think now about your flat, flat 79 on the 11th floor, I think it's right that you would walk along the corridor first of all, and then there would be a front door that would lead on to two bedrooms on that level and a bathroom?

A. Yes.

Q. Can I show you a diagram which I don't think you will have seen before, but I'll explain to you what we're looking at. This is a diagram which shows the layout of a typical flat which has the bedrooms facing west towards Havil Street.

A. Yes.

Q. Your flat, flat 79, was that way round, wasn't it, with the bedrooms facing that way?

A. Yes.
Q. So we can see that as you come into the front door, just where I put the cursor --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- there are two bedrooms on that floor?
A. Yes.
Q. And the bathroom to the right --
A. Yes.
Q. -- where I've just put the cursor. And then you could come upstairs onto the top floor with the lounge and the kitchen.
A. Yes.
Q. Do you recall that there were balconies on both sides of the building?
A. Yes.
Q. Just coming back to the photos for a moment, there's a picture there of a balcony. Is that the sort of balcony that was outside --
A. Yes.
Q. -- on both sides, and just looking to the back of that photograph, there's a door with a green sign?
A. Yes.
Q. I can show you a close-up there, photograph 37. Were you aware what the function of those balconies was?
A. Yeah, it was a fire escape.
Q. In that case, Mr Aveling, I'll come back to that
a little later on, if I may.

A. Okay.

Q. Can I just ask you one other question, which is about smoke alarms. Did you have a smoke alarm fitted?

A. After the new renovations, yes. Not -- not in -- when I first moved in but -- so, you know, when they did the Decent Homes thing, that's when the fire alarm was fitted in.

Q. So that would have been the works that were carried out in 2006 and 2007?

A. Yes, yeah.

Q. Could I move on, please, then, to the second topic, which is some of the things which happened between the time when you became a tenant and 2009. I'd like first, please, to ask you about alterations which were carried out to flat 79, works that were carried out.

Could I ask you please, first of all, about the front door. So far as you know, had the front door itself ever been changed between the time when you became a tenant and 2009?

A. No.

Q. Had the letter plate ever been changed? That is the part of the door that has the letterbox in it.

A. Yes.

Q. Was that something which you did or something which
somebody else did?

A. Which I did.

Q. Could you just explain to us what was changed and when you did it?

A. Well the -- the one that was originally on the door was aluminium, very light, and of course the corridors were kept open so -- they didn't have windows, so there was a lot of air, so what you got was a continual knocking on the door through the wind. So I just went and got a brass one, which was a lot sturdier, and fitted that in. That was it.

Q. Did that solve the problem you've mentioned about the wind?

A. Yes, yes, wind-proof and -- yeah, just a better design.

Q. Was there anything on the front door that said which flat it was?

A. Yes, there was a number, 79.

Q. Where was that on the door?

A. Just above the spy hole, I guess you'd call it, at the top, top middle.

Q. Can you remember what form it was in? For example, was it painted on the door or was it metal fixtures?

A. No, metal fixtures.

Q. Was it the number in metal, or was it a plate?

A. No, it was both numbers separately, 7 and 9, in gold
Q. You said that it was just above the spy hole. Is that at roughly head height?
A. Yeah, just a bit bigger actually, because -- it would be about a foot and a half bigger, I should imagine, or a foot at least.
Q. I think it's right that in the mid-1990s you carried out some work to your flat which involved making some changes to the steps --
A. Yes.
Q. -- in the internal staircase and the wall which was between the bottom of the internal stairs and the rest of the ground floor of the flat. I'll ask you about that in a little bit of detail if I may. I'll just put up on the screen to help us another diagram, and you can tell us whether we have understood correctly the work that was done.
A. Yes, that's --
Q. If I just take us back for a moment to this diagram. That shows the typical layout, as we understand it, of the one of the flats.
A. Yeah.
Q. Just so we can get our bearings, we have the front door here where the cursor is?
A. Yes.
Q. And then to go up the steps, one would turn left and come up where my cursor is and that would lead up to the lounge and the kitchen?
A. Yeah.
Q. So we can see that to begin with there was a wall between the bottom of the steps and this bedroom here where I've put the cursor?
A. Yes, that's right.
Q. This is probably a helpful stepping stone between the two so we can see where the differences are. Do you see that there are two parts highlighted? One is that dividing wall between the steps and the bedroom.
A. Yes.
Q. And then there is a red section on the bathroom?
A. Yes.
Q. Then if I go to the third image, this is intended to show how the flat was after the alterations were carried out.
A. Okay.
Q. So can I just ask you first of all, please, looking at the bathroom, what change was made in the bathroom? Can you remember?
A. Yeah, the -- there was -- in the bedroom wall, there was a section cut out with light -- with clear glass bricks.
Q. Sorry, in the wall where the cursor is?
A. No, just over here, just by the --
Q. Sorry, to the left or to the right?
A. Left. Yes, that's it, keep going. There. There was just a column of glass bricks cut there so natural light could flow through the bedroom into -- so you could get that into the bathroom. Otherwise you had to turn the light on every time you wanted to either have a bath or something, and you didn't have to, in that case, because you could -- you know, you'd have sunlight going in there.
Q. So we're clear, sorry, what was the change? Was it that those glass bricks were added?
A. It was just -- added. The glass bricks were added, and it was just a column --
Q. In place of the solid surface?
A. Yes, in -- the plasterboard, which that wall was, was plasterboard -- there was a column cut out of the plasterboard and glass bricks -- a column of glass bricks was added there.
Q. If I just go back to the diagram with the red highlighting. Do you see there's a red section in between the area by the front door --
A. Yes, that was gone as well.
Q. What was that? What was the change?
A. I think that was a drying area. It was -- so it was
a -- you know, where you could put towels and stuff. So that was opened so you had a large hallway and then you could hang your coats there, because you already had a drying area above the -- above the -- the boiler, so -- they'd just given you a lot of drying area, I guess. Probably too much.

Q. Those two changes which you've just mentioned to us, were those changes which you made?
A. Yes, I made them.

Q. Can you remember roughly when you did that?
A. Yeah, it was pretty soon after I moved in. So it was still in the 90s, in the late 90s -- sort of mid-90s, sorry, so it would be -- it would be '95, or -- yeah, '94 or '95. I don't remember the exact date.

Q. Can we then think about the change to do with the wall between the steps and the bedroom. I've just put back on screen the typical flat diagram so we can remind ourselves what was there.
A. Yes.

Q. So in this wall, we have the small door that led to the cupboard under the stairs.
A. Yes.

Q. Then there was another door, I think, in the wall between the flat and the corridor?
A. That's correct.
Q. So one could get from the bedroom into the corridor by
going through first this door and then secondly the door
between the flat and the corridor?
A. That's right.

Q. If we go back to the version which shows how things were
after the change, do we see that that door is still in
place?
A. Yes.

Q. But that part of the wall towards the bottom of the
steps has been removed?
A. Yes.

Q. I should ask, is that a change which you made?
A. Yes, that's a change that I made.

Q. Was there also a change to the steps themselves?
A. Yes, I changed -- the steps became treads with -- with
no risers in, so it was -- it was just more of a modern
design really.

Q. What was the purpose of making those changes?
A. Well, when you open the door, you would just -- it was
just very dark, hence in the original building there was
two -- two pendant lamps, another one on the top of the
landing, and -- so, yeah, you had to come in -- even if
it was in the daytime, you would have to come in and
turn the lights on, so because I was the only tenant --
I had the entire flat myself -- I didn't need separate
rooms, so I opened that out to get light, and that
became a sitting room, with my bedroom here on the left
kept closed.

Q. What I'd like to do now, please, is to ask you about any
discussions you had with the council about those changes
that we've just looked at.

A. Okay.

Q. Could I start by asking whether, before you did the
work, you contacted the council to say, "I'm thinking
about doing this work. Do you agree?"

A. No, I just did the work.

Q. I'm just going to show you one or two documents that we
have which perhaps are related to the work that you've
been describing. This first document is page 565, this
time in the chronological bundles. It's file number 2,
and Mr Clark, I think, is about to hand you a copy on
paper. (Handed) We can see that that is a letter from
Southwark Council headed paper. In the top right-hand
corner --

A. Yes.

Q. -- the words "housing department". The letter is dated
23 May 1994, and it's addressed to Mr A Aveling --
that's you?

A. Yes.

Q. -- in flat 79. We can see that the writer of that
letter, who is a Ms L Going, from the neighbourhood housing office, has written to you and said:

"I am writing following my visit to you on Thursday last week. I have had further complaints regarding the noise from your flat. While I am aware of the works you are carrying out, I must stipulate that you do not work after 5 pm as the continual noise is annoying tenants below your property."

Then they says:

"I will, as advised, arrange a date for the building inspector to call once you advise me that the stairs have been restored."

A. Yes.

Q. Do you recall receiving that letter?

A. No -- well, now I do, but I would never -- it's just something that would have escaped my memory until I've seen it and now I recall it.

Q. So far as you can remember, were the council aware in around about May 1994 that you were doing the work?

A. Oh yes, they were aware, yes.

Q. If we look at the next page, page 566 in the same bundle, this time we have a memo on Southwark Council paper. It may well be that this is a document which you have never seen and which wouldn't have been sent to you, but I'd just like to ask whether what is said in it
ties in with your recollection. We can see it's headed
"Memo, copy to file", and it says:

"Re 79 Lakanal. After cockroach treatment on
22 April 1994, force entry. Robert Reid and P Cox
advised that the property was in need of inspection.
The non-load-bearing walls to the bottom half of the
staircase had been removed."

Just pausing there, is it correct so far as you knew
that the wall between the stairs and the bedroom was not
a load-bearing wall?

Q. You knew that it wasn't?
A. Of course, because otherwise I wouldn't have been able
to take it down.
Q. And then, carrying on:

"I spoke to Mr Aveling, the tenant, on the phone and
he advised that the stairs were rotten and he would be
rebuilding them with his uncle (a builder)."
A. Yes, they were, yeah.
Q. The steps were rotten?
A. Yes, well, the -- so was the landing, from the previous
tenant, because they didn't have time when they gave me
the flat to fix up the flat. It was just a quick let,
you know, and so it was always needing fixing. But they
thought at the time it was quite a clean flat, and this
was one of the benefits of getting given the flat, but
it had, you know -- of course there was conditions, and
that was that. But I had to take it because that was
all I had on offer.

Q. Then, just in that bottom paragraph of the note, we can
see that the writer has said:

"Visited property on 19 May 1994 -- walls rebuilt.
Building inspector to call once works completed to check
bld [which is presumably 'build'] standard."

A. Yes.

Q. Do you remember what's referred to there, somebody from
Southwark Council telephoning you to speak about the
work and subsequently somebody coming to look at what
had been done to check the standard of it?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you, at that stage, asked to reinstate what had
been there before?

A. No, I was -- I told them what I was doing, and they just
said, "Well, it has to -- if you do move out, it has to
be like for like", so I'd have to put it back, whereas
otherwise it just has to be made at a good standard and
that they would check that standard, and when they did
come to check it, they signed it as a good standard of
work, and so that was that. But they wouldn't -- they
didn't want the stairs putting back but they -- if I was
to move out, they wanted the plasterboard partition back, which is understandable, I guess.

Q. You mentioned two things there. You said "when they checked it", first of all.

A. Yes.

Q. So did somebody in fact come to look at it?

A. Yes, somebody came to look and sign the work off.

Q. Can you remember who it was who came to look, either their name or perhaps their job?

A. No, that was their job, was inspections. I had no -- he was a young lad but I would never know his name.

Q. The second thing was that you mentioned that something was signed.

A. Yes.

Q. Was something written down and given to you about work?

A. Yes, it had to be signed. Something was given to me. He had to have a signature for his superiors, I presume, after him checking the work, and that -- and that's what -- you know, when he came to visit he saw it and that was it. That's when we signed.

Q. Is that document that you mentioned something that you still have?

A. No, 'cos everything went in the fire. I mean, I did have quite a comprehensive backlog of stuff but that was all in the house at the time.
Q. I'd like to show you, please, another document which came quite a lot later in time, and again may well be a document that you have not seen before. It's at page 2689 of the chronological bundle. It's in file number 7.

THE CORONER: Before you read through that -- Mr Aveling, we're losing your voice.

A. Sorry. Maybe -- should I try this one? Is that better?

THE CORONER: You can physically move the microphone. Perhaps, Mr Clark, you can help just to move the microphone. That little one isn't working, so don't worry about that one. Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Page 2689, please. (Handed) Looking at this page, then, it's headed "Alan Hodgkinson & Associates, consulting civil and structural engineers" and the date, this time a little below that, on the right-hand side, is 17 October 2006.

A. Yes.

Q. I think it's right that the Decent Homes works that you mentioned earlier started in around about March 2006?

A. That's right.

Q. So this was a letter which was written apparently after those works had started?

A. Yes.

Q. Before we look at what's said, do you recall ever having
seen this letter before?

A. No, because -- well, was it sent on 17 October?

Q. Well, it isn't a letter which is addressed to you, I should have pointed out.

A. No, okay.

Q. It's written to Ms Sidney, who, as the jury will hear in due course, is somebody who worked for Southwark Building Design Services.

A. Yes, okay.

Q. So on the face of it, this wouldn't have been a letter which you had seen.

A. No, so -- okay.

Q. If we look at what is said in it. It's headed "79 Lakanal" and then the writer has said:

"As requested, I made a further visit to site yesterday to inspect this unit, to determine whether the internal alterations carried out by the tenant were of structural significance. The alterations comprised the alteration and removal of calls around the entrance lobby. The walls were of lightweight construction and were built off the floor finish and are clearly non-load-bearing. It is understood that the changes were made approximately ten years ago. I am pleased to confirm that the alterations have no structural significance either to this unit or the block as
a whole. You may wish to consider whether fire safety is affected, but from our discussions this seems unlikely."

A. Yes.

Q. "However, this is not within my expertise. I trust this will be helpful."

What I wanted to ask you was this: it appears from that letter that somebody, probably an engineer from Alan Hodgkinson & Associates, visited your flat in around about October 2006. Do you remember somebody like that coming to inspect the property at that time?

A. Yes. There were a lot of people coming in to inspect the property, but I'd assumed it wasn't just mine, because they were having to do the changes, and so -- because of the New Homes Act. So there was -- they were coming to check -- you know, it was a big works, and so that -- so there was -- you know, there was a lot around that time, and -- but I would have no idea that they would have been inspecting about this -- about my flat in particular. They were just -- I just thought that they were doing what they had to do in preparation for the New Homes Act.

Q. At that point, then, in 2006, when people were visiting your flat as part of the Decent Homes works, again were you asked to reinstate what had been there before?
A. No.

Q. So is it the case that once you had made the changes in, it seems, 1994, the flat stayed in that state until 2009?

A. Yes, absolutely. I mean, that was done. There was never any concern about it.

Q. Could I move on to a new topic, then, please. The jury have heard that there was a fire in flat 81 in 1997.

A. Yes.

Q. That is the flat which is next door to yours, on the same side of the corridor?

A. Yes.

Q. Is it correct that when that fire happened you were inside flat 79?

A. Yes, I was.

Q. And that to begin with, you were able to remain in your flat but eventually it got to the stage where there was so much smoke you decided that you should leave?

A. Yes, that's right, yeah.

Q. Can you remember on that occasion how you left your flat, which route you took?

A. Yes, I went upstairs, across the sitting room, which -- or the lounge, as you've written it on the diagram, and out on the east side balcony, and out through the fire exit, which you saw on the balcony -- this one, that's
it -- and then down the stairwell.

Q. On that occasion, is it correct that the fire in flat 81
didn't spread either into your flat or into any of the
other flats in the building?
A. That's correct; it didn't spread.

Q. In that case, could I please move on to events connected
with the fire on 3 July 2009.
A. Okay.

Q. The jury know that at the time of the fire
Catherine Hickman was living in flat 79.
A. Yes.

Q. And the jury have heard evidence from Mr Bailey as well.
A. Yes.

Q. Could I just ask for roughly how long you had known the
two of them by 2009?
A. Three years.

Q. Is it right that you yourself work in the music business
and therefore are quite often away from the property?
A. Yes.

Q. And for that reason you had suggested to them that they
might move in to your flat?
A. Well, it wasn't -- it was just Mark. He needed -- it
was -- I needed a friend to look after my place while
I was in New York and he'd offered, and that was it.
You know, just to let -- if anyone was in, because --
you know, whether it's floods or what-have-you. So yes, he was doing that, and then Catherine moved in about a year later than that.

Q. I understand.

A. Or probably a bit less.

Q. On 3 July itself, on the day of the fire, is it correct that you were in east London, near London Fields?

A. Yes.

Q. And that you first heard that there was a fire going on when a friend of yours telephoned you --

A. Yes.

Q. -- to let you know. Are you able to remember roughly what time you were phoned and you first became aware that the fire was happening?

A. It was in the afternoon. I don't know the minutes, or --

Q. Who was it who telephoned you?

A. It was a friend in my -- we were in the same band together. He worked below in the pub that was next door to the building, and he phoned me up and said, "Your flat's on fire." Well, he said actually: "Your building's on fire."

Q. Did he say anything about how long it had been on fire, whether it was something that had just started or something which had been going on for a time?
A. No, no.

Q. Once you had received that message, of course, you were concerned about where Catherine was?

A. Yes.

Q. And you did everything that you could to get in touch with her?

A. Yes.

Q. Because you were unable to reach here, you went yourself to Lakanal?

A. Yes.

Q. I think you drove there, is that right, on a scooter?

A. Yes.

Q. From London Fields to Lakanal?

A. Yes.

Q. And on the way you saw a fire engine?

A. Yes.

Q. And you followed the fire engine, which, as it turned out, was heading to Lakanal House?

A. Yes. I mean, it was just -- I was in the wake of the fire engine, and then -- I had no idea that it was going to Lakanal, and then, of course, when I realised it was, that's when I thought, "This is serious."

Q. Why was it that you thought at that stage that it must be serious?

A. Well, because, you know, you just expect local fire
engines to be dealing with a fire. If something's coming from -- I think I picked it up at Whitechapel, then you realise that a lot more stations are on call and it's got to be serious.

Q. When you arrived there, is it correct that you spoke to various members of the emergency services, from the police, the Fire Brigade, the ambulance service --

A. Yes.

Q. -- in order to try to find out what was going on and where Catherine was?

A. Well, just to let them know that there may be somebody in there on -- you know, given the flat number, that we -- I couldn't get in touch with that person and until we could assess where she was -- because I knew Mark was in New York, so until we can assess where Catherine was, because she was meant to be going to Brighton, that, you know, it needed to be looked into, and also I, you know -- I mean, it was quite early on still in the fire, but it was clear that that particular point was in trouble, that particular section, and so it was even more important that something was established to let them know that it's worth trying to get up there and having a look at that floor.

Q. When you arrived at the building, can you remember how many fire engines there were, whether it was, for
example, one or two or whether there was a lot more than
that?
A. Well, there was a lot of commotion. I mean, I didn't
count. It was busy. I don't know if it was just --
I mean, it was all cordoned off. There was police,
there was ambulance, you know. I can't remember how
many engines there were. I wasn't counting.
Q. Is it correct that at one point one of the firemen asked
you whether the flat which was completely burnt out was
your flat?
A. Yes.
Q. And you said to him that it was?
A. Yes, and then he led me into the perimeter, and then he
got -- he started calling up somebody, which sounded
quite urgent.
Q. Did there come a point later on when you saw first of
all a lady and a baby being brought out of the building?
A. Yes, I saw that.
Q. And also when you saw your neighbour Rafael, who
appeared to be --
A. When he was distraught, yes.
Q. -- distressed. At that stage, I think it's right that
you didn't know where Catherine was?
A. Yes.
Q. Nobody had established that yet. You did what you could
to help by going with the police first of all to
St Thomas' Hospital and then to Lewisham hospital?
A. Yes. Well, that was -- yes -- you know, all credit to
them, they were, you know, keeping you as optimistic as
possible. They were giving -- there was two options on
hospitals and no-one could get through to Lewisham, so
I was driven to St Thomas' to -- to see if that wasn't
the case. She wasn't there obviously.
Q. So in summary, you did everything that you could by
going to Lakanal, by speaking on the emergency services,
to find out where Catherine was and to help --
A. Yes, I was there all day and all night, until -- until
the middle of the night when we met up with Catherine's
family and was at Peckham police station doing
statements, so ... 
Q. But eventually you learned the very sad news that
Catherine had passed away?
A. Well, yeah, we'd learnt that there was a body found in
the apartment. They weren't saying who it was but
obviously it was presumed that -- and then, very, very
late, I don't know, there was some description or
something, because at first it was just assumed that
there was a body and it could have been a neighbour
running in and getting caught out, so -- and that's when
we realised that that was that.
Q. Mr Aveling, thank you. Those are all the questions I have. If you would be good enough to wait there, there may be questions from others.

A. Okay.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai.

Questions by MS AL TAI

MS AL TAI: Good morning, Mr Aveling.

A. Hello.

Q. I act on behalf of Mark Bailey.

A. Okay.

Q. I don't have very many questions for you because Mr Atkins has covered a vast majority of my questions. It's just really in respect of one issue, and it's the previous fire back in 1997 during which you escaped the premises.

A. Okay.

Q. There might be a jury bundle next to you. If not, I'll ask Mr Clark to assist, please. I'm going to ask you to look at some photographs.

A. Okay. (Handed)

Q. It's the photograph actually up on the screen, I do apologise. It's tab 13, page 37. Mr Aveling, I understand that you escaped from the east side; is that correct?

A. Yes.
Q. I'm not certain if that is the correct angle but --
A. No, that's -- that's -- that's the west side entrance.
Q. Thank you, Mr Aveling. That's what I understand it to be as well. I'm using this particular photograph because it gives an indication of the proximity of a door of a flat in close proximity to the stairwell. Is that what you understand it to be as well?
A. Sorry?
Q. Let me rephrase my question. I apologise. This picture in particular shows a flat next to the stairwell, the central stairwell?
A. Yes.
Q. And that door emerges onto a balcony?
A. This door, yes.
Q. The door on the left-hand side emerges to --
A. Yes, that would be the kitchen and you'd come out there and that's the balcony on the west side balcony.
Q. And as we've understood your evidence -- and we've heard from various individuals -- the door in the centre of the picture with the green sign, that's the fire escape door?
A. That is the fire escape door, yes.
Q. Really I just want to get an understanding from you of the proximity of your balcony door to the escape door.
A. It's the closest on -- in all of the flats on that side.
1 Q. It's quite close, you would agree with me?
2 A. Yes, it's very close, and it's the closest.
3 Q. I know it probably seems like an obvious question, but
4 how long would it take you to get from your balcony door
5 to the fire escape door?
6 A. Just two steps.
7 Q. Two steps. Thank you very much, Mr Aveling.
8 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury?
9 Questions by the Jury
10 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner, we just
11 have two. I was just wondering: in regard to the
12 alterations that were made in the flat, with the wall
13 being taken out, was it -- the door was left. I was
14 wondering if that was for aesthetic reasons or whether
15 the frame was in some way part of the structure you
16 couldn't remove?
17 A. No -- yeah, the door was left. It's just -- I just
18 assumed I had to leave the doors. I mean, yeah, it
19 would have been probably nicer if it was all down but it
20 was just -- I kept all the woodwork. It was -- I just
21 wanted to add light to the place and it was just me that
22 was living there, didn't -- aesthetically, it wasn't
23 a problem.
24 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. We've heard how you
25 spoke to members of the emergency services, stating that
you were from flat 79 and you thought somebody might be
in there. When you were discussing this with the
emergency services people, do you recall if you
mentioned which floor flat 79 was on, or just the flat
number?
A. No, I told them it was the 11th floor.
THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you very much. That's
all.

Questions by the Coroner
THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Aveling. When you were escaping
from your flat from the 1997 fire --
A. Yes.
THE CORONER: -- I think you told us that you escaped from
the eastern side.
A. Yes.
THE CORONER: Was there anything which made you choose the
east side rather than the west side?
A. Yes, 'cos the fire was on the west side, as it was on
the -- 2009. Why that is, I don't know, but the fire
was -- there was -- that's why there's two escapes, for
that reason, I presume, that if -- because if there's
bellowing smoke coming up, you have to pick the other
side. So there was no escape on the west side on, it
turns out, either of the occasions.
THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Aveling, thank you
very much for coming and thank you very much for the help that you've been able to give to us.

A. Thank you.

THE CORONER: You're welcome to stay if you would like, but you're free to go if you would prefer.

A. All right, okay, thanks very much. Goodbye.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew)

MR ATKINS: Madam, we now have --

THE CORONER: Well, I was going to say, Mr Atkins, would that be is sensible point for a short break?

MR ATKINS: Madam, if it's convenient for the court, then yes.

THE CORONER: All right, shall we do that? Thank you very much. Shall we have a break until 11.30?

Members of the jury, you're welcome to leave your papers there if you would like. Be back for 11.30, please.

(11.16 am)

(A short break)

(11.33 am)

MR ATKINS: Madam, before the jury come in, could I just mention that there are two pages to be added to the jury bundle which will go in tab number 27. They are the one-page summaries of the functions and responsibilities
of the London Fire Brigade and the London Borough of Southwark. Madam, these are documents which were circulated a little while ago. More recently, Mr Maxwell-Scott circulated an email to the properly interested persons asking whether they should be included or whether there was any objection, and Ms Al Tai responded saying that it would be helpful for them to be included.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Good. Yes, and the other one?

Okay. Thank you very much.

MR ATKINS: Madam, we do have copies for the advocates. They’ll be handed out shortly.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

(In the presence of the Jury)

THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Atkins, thank you.

MR ATKINS: Madam, yes, before the next witness there are two pages to be added to the jury bundle.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR ATKINS: They go into tab 27. I think we have copies ready to be handed out to the members of the jury. Just to explain what the pages are, they are one-page summaries of the roles and responsibilities first of all of the London Fire Brigade and secondly of the London Borough of Southwark, which may assist the jury really as an aide memoire.
THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Madam, the next witness is to be Mr David Smettem.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Would you like to come forward, Mr Smettem. Thank you.

DAVID SMETTEM (sworn)

THE CORONER: Mr Smettem, thank you for coming. Do take your coat off if you want to, to be more comfortable. Just hang it over the back rail there. That will be fine. Thank you very much. Do help yourself to a glass of water if you like. I think you might have been sitting at the back earlier so you might have experienced the difficulties in hearing in this room, so keep your voice up and if you could speak closely to the microphones.

A. Is it both? I think one of them is a little bit --

THE CORONER: I hope that they are both picking up and that this will assist, but it's not assisting hugely, so if you could make sure you do speak up as much as possible.

A. Being a Geordie, I think I can manage English. I think I've sort of mastered it a bit.

THE CORONER: Well, I'm only just hearing you.

A. Okay.

THE CORONER: If you could direct your answers across the room towards the members of the jury, then that will
help them to hear what you are saying and also keep you close to the microphones.

A. Will do. Thanks very much.

THE CORONER: Mr Atkins, who is standing, is going to ask questions initially on my behalf and then there may be questions from others.

A. Okay, thanks.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

MR ATKINS: Could you please tell the court your full name please?

A. My full name is David Edward Smettem.

Q. Mr Smettem, is it right you have now retired?

A. That's right.

Q. But formerly you worked as a technical officer for the London Borough of Southwark?

A. That's right.

Q. Could you briefly just summarise for the members of the jury your qualifications?

A. I have a City & Guilds qualification in building construction and also science-related subjects.

Q. Is it correct that you first joined the London Borough of Southwark in 1982?

A. That's right, on 1 October 1982.

Q. And that you then worked for Southwark for 28 years?

A. 28 years and three months.
Q. 28 years and three months?
A. Sorry, 28 years, three months.
Q. Thank you. Mr Smettem, you may be aware, I don't know, that you are the first witness that the jury will be hearing from who worked for the London Borough of Southwark, and it's obvious that you had a great deal of experience of working for Southwark in that 28-year period. As we go through your evidence, it may be that you will be able to help us to understand who would be doing what and how the different people in their different roles would work together in relation to housing in Southwark. So if you are able to help us with that, then all to the good.
A. Yes, fine.
Q. And if we find that I'm asking you questions that you don't know the answers on to or things that you can't remember, just let us know.
A. Fine.
Q. I mentioned earlier that at the point when you retired, your job description was technical officer.
A. That's right.
Q. Has your job title always been the same?
A. The -- when I started in October 1982, I actually started as a technical assistant but due to reorganisations, the job may have changed its name,
mainly to a building inspector and then finally to
a technical assistant -- or technical officer -- but in
effect, the job didn't really change a great deal, just
in certain areas of responsibility that may actually
reduce or add to it.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Could you just briefly give us a flavour of your
day-to-day responsibilities, the sort of work you would
have been doing?

A. Yes. When I -- I worked by what was called technical
referral. That meant that day-to-day items that was
reported as complaints, alleged disrepair, to the
council, would normally be dealt via the call centre.
So if it was something relatively simple like, say,
somebody had a plumbing leak or something, the call
centre would raise an order directly to the council's
contractors and there would be no involvement in my sort
of input at that time. I would only get involved if,
for example, that plumbing leak caused a terrific amount
of water damage to the flat or it was outside the
expertise of the housing officer concerned.

Q. So in other words, there would be some jobs which were
straightforward?

A. Yes.

Q. Which wouldn't require your involvement?
A. Yes.

Q. But you would be contacted if there was something either a little more complicated or a little larger in scale --

A. That's right. That's right, exactly.

Q. -- that called for your involvement?

A. Yeah.

Q. Could I ask you, please, about the way in which the team that you worked for and that team's responsibilities changed between when you started working in 1982 for Southwark and the point when you retired. Just taking each phase in turn, is it correct that when you started working for Southwark in 1982, Southwark was split into six districts?

A. That's right.

Q. And that you worked in the Camberwell district?

A. That's right. There were six very large districts. When I started, it's best to say that Southwark Council had between 64 and 65,000 properties, anything from a bungalow to a 20-storey tower block, and my particular area of Camberwell district had something like 10,800 properties to cover, which obviously, with the benefit of hindsight, was a lot for one person as a technical person.

Q. The Camberwell district, was that subdivided into about 26 estate offices?
A. That's right. They were -- when I started, I reported to a -- the main office at 92 Purnell Way(?). It was in a purpose -- purpose-built office on the peripheral of the North Peckham estate in Commercial Road, and although there was 24 estates offices, there was also two suboffices, one office at Hordle Promenade West(?) on the North Peckham estate and there was another suboffice at the Gloucester Grove(?) -- if you like, the forerunners to the later neighbourhood offices but on a smaller scale.

Q. Just pausing there, so we have a number of estate offices and also these two suboffices all within the Camberwell district?

A. That's right.

Q. And is it the case at that time that the estate office you worked with included responsibility for Lakanal House?

A. That's right.

Q. I think then there was a restructuring in 1991 --

A. That's right.

Q. -- in which Southwark was decentralised into 21 neighbourhood offices. Are those the neighbourhood offices you mentioned just a moment ago?

A. That's right, the neighbourhood -- because -- can I just point out that because the six large districts were
quite -- I mean, they were very large, it -- Southwark had some --

THE CORONER: Sorry, Mr Smettem, can I just stop you there. I think it would be very interesting but what we're trying to focus on are elements of the background to this which are really relevant to the matters that we need to deal with in the inquests, so it would be helpful if you could just deal with Mr Atkins' direct questions. If you feel you need to amplify, then that's fine, but just take your lead from Mr Atkins at the moment if you would.

A. Okay.

MR ATKINS: Yes, Mr Smettem, I'm simply keen to establish what the changes were in outline and which were the points in time when Lakanal fell within your part of the system, if you like. So we began in 1982 with the six districts, with you in the Camberwell district.

A. That's right.

Q. And Lakanal within your responsibility?

A. That's right.

Q. The restructure in 1991, which led to the 21 neighbourhood offices -- I think at that point, is it right that you were a building inspector at the Harris Street neighbourhood office?

A. That's right.
Q. And at that point, Lakanal House fell into something called the Rosemary Gardens neighbourhood office?
A. That's right, Rosemary Gardens.
Q. And therefore was not within your personal scope of responsibility?
A. That's right.
Q. That was then followed in 1997 by a restructuring of those neighbourhood offices which once again brought Lakanal House back within your sphere?
A. Exactly.
Q. And then lastly, in 2005, there was a merger of the Harris Street neighbourhood office with two others, West Camberwell and Denmark Hill, thereby creating the Camberwell area?
A. That's right.
Q. And from that point onwards, 2005 onwards, you were one of three technical officers?
A. That's right.
Q. And again, Lakanal was within your responsibility --
A. That's right.
Q. -- at that point. So just taking a step back, you potentially could have had involvement with Lakanal from 1982 up until about 1991?
A. That's right.
Q. And then again from 1997 until the point when you
Q. After the restructure in 2005, which was the merger to firm the Camberwell area, is it correct that you were reporting to somebody with the job title "repairs team manager"?
A. That's right.

Q. You have explained to us already that you would become involved when there was a complaint, perhaps from a resident, or some problem had arisen which couldn't simply be dealt with by the telephone help desk logging the problem and sending a contractor to deal with it. Would there ever have been occasions when you would involve a third party -- for example an independent surveyor or somebody from the Fire Brigade, perhaps -- to help you with your work?
A. Yes.

Q. How would that come about?
A. Because the repairs and maintenance that we -- that we actually worked with, this was a contract -- based on a contract that obviously was put out to tender, we were given a limit of up to £10,000 --

Q. Sorry, pausing there, the contract you that you mentioned --
A. Yeah.
Q. Was that a contract that you and your team were working under?
A. That's right.
Q. So you had a contract with some other part of Southwark, did you, to carry out repair type work?
A. Well, we had a -- what's called a schedule of --
a contract which included a schedule of rates of work
for different types of job at different values. If it
grew outside the limit of £10,000, we would have to
refer it up to our consultants, which was Southwark
Building Design Services.
Q. Leaving aside the question of value for a moment,
because you've said if it was too expensive you would
have to refer it to somebody else --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- if there was an item of work which needed to be done
which was within your budget, below that threshold, but
which had some complicated element to it -- for example,
if something had happened which had a structural
significance for a property -- would there be times when
you would go to, for example, a surveyor, either from
within Southwark or an external surveyor to get their
input into the work that had to be done?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. And is that something which you would arrange or your
team would arrange for works within that value threshold?

A. I would report it to my repairs manager, saying that I needed an input from a -- either a building surveyor or maybe a structural engineer, and so they would obviously send a referral off to the internal organisation of Southwark, and then I would be told that -- who the consultant was, so we would liaise together. So in effect, I would, like, give them the background to that problem and probably work alongside them or again, give them any information, like maybe the odd drawing or two or something like that.

Q. So there was no difficulty, by the sound of it, in obtaining that sort of help if it was necessary?

A. That's right.

Q. The jury are aware already that a substantial amount of work was carried out at Lakanal House in 2006/2007 which went well beyond the sort of budget which you mentioned a moment ago. If the property was identified for refurbishment on that sort of scale, what kind of involvement would you and your team have with that?

A. Mainly initial advisory, because under the neighbourhood system at Harris Street, we would be told by our line manager, which would then be, at that time, a contracts manager -- would say that we may have got the go ahead
to do -- in the case of Lakanal House, put forward for major refurbishment, and I would be asked to not too either sit in or to advise and to give initial advisory information, like historical information or any necessarily information to the consultant that would obviously be in charge of the contract, so in effect give a lot of background information, historical information, and also any other technical information which is relevant to allow the consultant to actually put together -- or complete their specification.

Q. Because if we think, for example, about Lakanal House, by the time of the 2006/2007 refurbs, Lakanal House had been within the scope of your responsibility for the best part of ten years --

A. That's right.

Q. -- at that stage. So do we take it then you were well placed to tell others what problems there had been historically and, for example, what previous works had been carried out?

A. Exactly.

Q. If works were to be carried out, whether to perhaps one particular flat or to a whole building, would you or members of your team have any design role? Would you be preparing specifications and drawings, for example?

A. No. It would be mainly historical information and also
giving them any information that we'd encountered -- or I encountered during the course of my involvement with Lakanal.

Q. I'll come back to what happened prior to the 2006/2007 works at Lakanal House a little later on, if I may, but just thinking about it in principle, and what would happen for the different projects, would you be involved in preparing or submitting any documents? For example, planning permission, would that be something that fell within your role?

A. No, that would all be done by the consultants, Southwark Building Design Services.

Q. Do you have a working knowledge of the requirements of the building regulations?

A. Yes, I have a reasonably good knowledge of the building regulations.

Q. Would you be required to use that knowledge in the context of those sorts of works? Would people be coming to you and saying, "This is what we're proposing to do; is that all right? Does that satisfy the requirements of the building regulations?" or would that sort of thing be done by somebody else?

A. That would mainly be done on the contract -- the major contract. Obviously, when you're dealing with consultant surveyors or architects or structural
engineers, you know, you wouldn't really sort of --

obviously, you would take it as read that they would be

in charge of all relevant approvals of building

regulations and all the relevant legal requirements.

Q. On a large project, would there invariably be

a surveyor, for example, involved?

A. It could be a surveyor. It could be a consulting

architect or an architect within Southwark.

Q. What about for smaller scale works that were within the

spending limit that you had? Would you rely on your own

knowledge or --

A. I mean, in most cases -- I would say probably in most

cases the -- I would probably be able to deal with that,

unless there was a specific technical problem that might

be outside my level of expertise.

Q. Would it then be up to you to make that assessment of

whether it was something that was within your expertise

or whether you needed outside help?

A. Yes. I mean, I think it's fair to say that there would

be times when you would, say, depending on the

circumstances -- I mean, for example, if it was like,

say, a legal case of alleged disrepair, sometimes it was

a case where we might have had to engage the services of

an outside consultant surveyor, because it was -- it was

preferable for having an independent view, if you like,
more like a second opinion, like what a doctor would do.

Q. Could I ask you a slightly different question. Once work had been carried out, whether modest repairs or something more significant, who would be involved in making sure that what had been done did in fact comply with any requirements?

A. Going back to the repairs and maintenance contract, the -- the conditions of the repairs and contract and the council builder would have obviously an obligation to make sure that all building works was up to the relevant building code, building regulations and standards. Our job was -- once we'd raised the order, was to make sure there was -- there would be certain checks that the council would ask us to do. We would always be asked to do what's called a post inspection, after the work was done, to make sure that the works were completed to satisfaction, like, from a -- on behalf of the council, to make sure that it was done properly.

Q. So in the case of the smaller scale works, it was a term of the contract that you and your team were working under that the builders would make sure that work was done properly and then you would have separate checks?

A. Yes, I think the builder would have a requirement in the contract -- the terms of the contract that they tendered
for, that they would -- the requirement was that they
had to either pay -- make sure everything was done in
accordance with the building regulations --
Q. Sorry, what about in the case of larger scale works,
such as the refurbishment of a block? What would the
process then be to check that the work that had been
done did comply with any requirements?
A. In the larger contracts that's outside the budget of
10,000 that I was responsible for, the council would
engage the services of a -- of what are called
a clerk of works, which would be under the direction of
the supervising consultant, and his or her job would be
to make sure that the job was checked on a daily basis
to make sure there was compliance with the terms of the
specification that was being carried out to
Lakanal House.
Q. In those circumstances, then, those checks would fall to
the clerk of works who was working for the consultant,
rather than to you?
A. Exactly.
Q. In your experience working on projects like that, would
there also be inspections by anybody from the building
control department? Would there be building inspectors
who would come and look at the work as it progressed or
when it was finished to satisfy themselves that it was
being done properly?

A. On a major refurbishment, once the contract is given to the supervising consultant, the supervising consultant takes charge of the contract money, if you like, that's been designated to that job. So he or she were being told a direction, which will obviously include the management of the clerk of works and obviously anybody else that would be associated with the contract, like maybe the quantity surveyor, sort of thing. So if you like, they would have like a small specialised team that would handle the day to day of that.

Q. Would there be any independent visits from somebody working for the building control section of the council, rather than checks by people who were working under direction of the consultant? Do you see what I mean? As a separate check.

A. Yes. I -- that would be between -- not to my -- sorry, to my knowledge, that was all something arranged between the supervising consultant and the building control. So any meetings that they had we wouldn't need to be there or have any knowledge of, so it was something in the remit of the supervising consultant.

Q. I'd like to ask you now a few questions so we can try to build up a picture of where different teams and different functions sat within the structure of
Southwark as at, say, 2005/2006, in other words just prior to the refurbishment works at Lakanal House.

Before I embark on this, I should say I appreciate that it's a large and complex organisation, that there have no doubt been many changes of personnel over the years, and also probably several reorganisations of which teams were in which department and so on.

Could I begin, then, thinking about 2005 and 2006, by asking which were the top level departments that the different teams sat in? Because I think, for example, it's right that there was a housing department; is that correct?

A. There was a -- I joined the housing department in 1982 but when the reorganisation occurred in January 2005, the housing department merged with the environmental services. So for the very first time, it was not a single department as such. It merged.

Q. Was the environmental services department -- is that the same thing as the environment and leisure department?

A. I believe so. I believe so.

Q. Was there also something called the regeneration and neighbourhoods department, can you remember?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. The repairs team that you were a part of, was that -- forgive me while I just check a note. Was that part of
something called the engineering and repairs department
or team?
A. I wouldn't know that, no.
Q. What was your team part of? Which department did you
sit in?
A. Like I say, we were -- the housing department will cease
to function as a single department up to January 2005
when it will merge with the -- the environmental
services, so from then on. But no other -- I cannot
think of anything else.
THE CORONER: Sorry, we're just trying to understand which
department your team was part of.
A. Sorry, we was -- we still functioned under the housing
department.
THE CORONER: Under the housing department?
A. Yeah.
MR ATKINS: Was there any mid-level division -- were there
different divisions within the housing department and
then you would be part of one of those divisions, or was
the repairs team the next level below the housing and
environment department?
A. I think the -- the -- I think we would just be housing
department. Sorry, the repairs, repairs and
maintenance.
Q. In that case, can I ask you about a team called the
Camberwell area office housing team from the Camberwell area office of the housing department. Is that a label that you're familiar with?

A. Yes, from January 2005 we moved from the walled neighbourhood office in Harris Street to the Camberwell district -- Camberwell area, sorry -- it would then be known as the Camberwell area office -- at Castlemead.

Q. So was the Camberwell area office a physical building, or was it also a team of people or a collection of teams?

A. In the -- from January 2005 at Castlemead, it housed the repairs and maintenance team, and for a short time we were next to -- or shared the same building with the major refurbishment team.

Q. The major refurbishment team, which you've just mentioned there, is that all they did? Was that a team whose job was to organise the refurbishment of large buildings?

A. Yes. They -- they actually would deal with nothing else but major refurbishment schemes.

Q. So if we were thinking about the sorts of housing officers who might have day-to-day involvement with tenants and helping them with problems, they will not be people who worked either for the repairs team or the major refurbishments team; they would be in some other...
team. Is that right?

A. That's right, yeah.

Q. So what would they be a part of? What was their team?

A. The -- sorry, could I just clarify that? There was two teams at Castlemead. There was the repairs and maintenance, of which I was a member, and like I said, there was the major refurbishment team. They were, if you like, subdivided into another part of the building, and obviously they had no contact with residents over day-to-day maintenance. They would only have contact with tenants where the major refurbishment scheme had some feedback, whether it be good or bad, from tenants, for major works only.

Q. Could I try approaching it from a different direction. Was there something called the investment management team?

A. Yes.

Q. Is that a separate --

A. I think they -- yes, a different thing, but they was also known as the investment team because -- when I say "major refurbishment", investment team would have been more -- more nearer their official title.

Q. So that is the same thing as the major refurbishment team that you mentioned?

A. Yes.
Q. The jury are likely to hear evidence from some witnesses who worked as part of that team in due course, so it's helpful now to identify that that team existed and just in general terms what their role was.

Was there also something called contract management? Was that a separate team, do you remember?

A. No, I would say it's the same team.

Q. The same as the investments team?

A. Yes, because you see in that team -- investment team was, in our case, certain members that -- of staff that we already knew under the old neighbourhood. So effectively the neighbourhood is split into -- we was in the same office, if you like, housed -- cooperating within the same housing department under the neighbourhood system. From January 2005, when we moved to Castlemead, we were known as repairs and maintenance, day-to-day maintenance, and they were known as the investment and, if you like, contract management team, yeah.

Q. Is it correct that there was a separate team or a separate organisation called Southwark Building Design Services?

A. That's right. That was our in house consultant architects and surveyors division.

Q. I think it's correct that Southwark Building Design
1 Services, or SBDS, were the consultants who were used in
2 relation to the 2006/2007 works at Lakanal House?
3 A. That's right.
4 Q. So when you were explaining to us a little earlier on
5 that on larger contracts the work would be done under
6 the direction of a consultant and the consultant might
7 then, for example, appoint a clerk of works, in the case
8 of the Lakanal House works, that was SBDS?
9 A. That's right.
10 Q. And I think you said they would look after the money
11 that had been allocated for the project and organise the
12 work that was to be done?
13 A. That's right.
14 Q. In the case of projects where SBDS were involved, if you
15 know the answer, would they be involved in, for example,
16 drawing up the tender documents or drawing up the
17 designs for the work to be carried out?
18 A. Yes. After the initial consultation with the
19 neighbourhood, going back to when we were
20 a neighbourhood from -- up to January 2005, the
21 initial -- the initial contact would be through the --
22 obviously they would come in to meet us, and obviously
23 we would give them the -- all the historical
24 information. So they would go away and obviously
25 prepare the documents and all the relevant information,
and prepare it ready to go out to tender.

Q. Did SBDS, so far as you are aware, employ professionals such as surveyors and architects and quantity surveyors?
A. That's right, exactly.

Q. People of that sort?
A. Exactly.

Q. To carry out those tasks? I think it's right that SBDS was part of the environment department, which, as you've mentioned to us, merged with the housing department; is that how you understand it?
A. I would say, yeah.

Q. Does it follow that there was somebody at the top of the housing and environment department who was responsible for both of those aspects, for the housing side, which included your repairs team, and also for the environment side, which included SBDS?
A. I don't -- I wouldn't like to answer that. I don't think I can answer that properly.

Q. Is it right that SBDS had, as part of that organisation, something called a building services group? Are you aware of that?
A. No.

Q. Do you know whether they had any personnel, any staff, who could carry out maintenance work or repair work on their behalf without having to come to you and your
A. No, it -- anything that would -- any works carried out by consultants was always at first initiated from a referral from the contracts manager based at that time at the neighbourhood. So the original referral for Lakanal would have come from the neighbourhood office.

Q. And the contracts manager who is making the referral, is that the person managing the contract that your team were working under? Is it the same contract or are we talking about a different contract?

A. Under the neighbourhood system, up to January 2005, the contracts manager -- sorry, the contracts manager would have initiated a referral to send off to Southwark Building Design Services to engage their services for the overall supervision of the contract.

Q. Yes, sorry, it was a question of which contract that I was driving at. The person has the job description of contracts manager, but which contract is it that they are the manager of? Is it the contract for you and your team to carry out repairs and maintenance or is it contracts to carry out other work?

A. The contracts manager at that time under the neighbourhood would have been responsible for the repairs and maintenance, which would come under -- I would come under, but also at that time would be in
charge of major refurbishment investment.

From January 2005, the repairs and maintenance became separated, but the new investment manager would be in charge of the major refurbishment, where -- which would include Lakanal.

Q. It may help if we tried to put some names to some of the job titles.

A. Certainly.

Q. Can I just take them through in turn and let me know if I've missed any as I go through.

A. Yeah.

Q. You told us that up to 2005 there was a contracts manager.

A. That's right.

Q. Who was that?

A. That was Sharon Shadbolt(?).

Q. Sharon Shadbolt?

A. Can I just correct that? At that time -- are we talking about the time of the initiation with -- the contract that was given for Lakanal House? It would have been Chris Ayton.

Q. I'm sorry, Chris ...?

A. Ayton, A-Y-T-O-N.

Q. Ayton?

A. Ayton.
Q. Yes.

A. Can I just qualify it again? It was either Sharon Shadbolt or Chris Ayton. I suspect it was probably Chris Ayton.

Q. So up to 2005, contracts manager either Chris Ayton or Sharon Shadbolt. Then you've mentioned that after 2005 the repairs team was split off. Who was the head of the repairs team at that time, if you can remember?

A. It was Peter -- I can't remember his second name.

Q. Peter?

A. Yeah.

Q. Then separately there was this investment or major refurbishment team. Are you able to remember who was in charge of that team?

A. The investment team?

Q. Yes.

A. That would have been Sharon Shadbolt.

Q. If Sharon Shadbolt was the contracts manager, does that mean there was no intervening level of management between that position and the major refurbishment team? In other words, there wasn't a separate major refurbishments manager who was reporting to Sharon Shadbolt; she was occupying both roles?

A. Up to January 2005, Chris Ayton would have been the contracts manager at Harris Street. Then because there
was the reorganisation, that means some of the staff had to obviously reapply for these new posts. Sharon Shadbolt obviously applied for the new investment manager's post, and I understand from January 2005 she became the investment manager. So we saw her at the Castlemead. She was -- she was next door to us in the investment team, when it reorganised.

Q. So after that reorganisation and the teams were split, was there somebody who still had the job description "contracts manager" or was that obsolete?

A. That would have been obsolete.

Q. Could I just mention a few other names to you, because they're people whose names the jury are likely to hear again. Somebody called either Charles Pearce or Robert Pearce?

A. Robert Pearce.

Q. Known as Robert Pearce?

A. Robert Pearce.

Q. Where did he fit into the structure?

A. Up to -- sorry, from January 2005, when we reorganised, Sharon Shadbolt, like I said, become the investment manager, but she went on maternity leave fairly shortly after the reorganisation in January 2005, and when we were at Castlemead, next door in the repairs and maintenance team, Robert Pearce stood in for her while
she was on what eternity leave.

Q. I see. So he was temporarily in Sharon Shadbolt's place, the investment team manager?

A. That's right.

Q. Is it right there was also a lady called Ejovi Awaritefe who also worked in the investments team? Do you know her?

A. Yes. She would have been under Sharon, as well as Robert filling in for Sharon, and she was like a day-to-day officer who would liaise with the tenants and be a contact between the tenants and either Sharon or Rob if there was any particular problems.

Q. I see. So the three of them, then -- that is Sharon Shadbolt, Robert Pearce when she was on maternity leave, and Ejovi Awaritefe -- the three of them were part of this investment team?

A. That's right.

Q. Moving on to some different names -- again, because the jury are likely to hear them again -- did you know somebody called Annabel Sidney, who was part of SBDS?

A. Yes.

Q. Is it right that she was involved in the 2006/2007 project at Lakanal?

A. That's right. She was in charge of the entire project of Lakanal House.
Q. Do you recognise either the names Vincent Edwards or Amos Adewalure?

A. Amos was the quantity surveyor. I've known Amos a lot of years from previous major refurbishment schemes, and Vince Edwards I knew on an earlier refurbishment scheme, yeah.

Q. So the three of them were part of SBDS, and again, is it right, to the best of your knowledge, that the three of them were also involved in the 2006/2007 works?

A. I would say Vince Edwards I don't actually remember having a great deal of knowledge --

THE CORONER: Well, if you don't know, Mr Smettem, just say you don't know. That's fine.

MR ATKINS: Did you know somebody by the name of Patrick Costello(?)? Is that a name you recognise?

A. I know the name.

Q. But not where he fits in perhaps?

A. Not so much, no.

Q. Thinking about a different department altogether, then, is it correct that there was a buildings control section or a building control department within Southwark?

A. That's right.

Q. Is it correct that that was part of something called the planning and transport division, do you remember?

A. We always knew it as the old -- either building
control -- some used to -- forerunner to the, you
know -- sometimes it was known as the district
surveyors, but building control. But --

Q. Did you, in the course of work that you did, ever have
a need to speak to anybody from building control or to
carry out any process with them?
A. Yes. Yes, if we needed any information.

Q. What sort of information?
A. Well, there would be times when we would -- we'd have
tenants who would be writing in for information about
proposed alterations to their properties and things like
that. So there would always be a time when we would
make contact with building control, you know, and --
because part and parcel of the building applications and
things like that, we would -- we would have a small part
in that. So there would be some sort of contact with
building control.

Q. In relation to the 2006/2007 works at Lakanal House, do
you recall whether you had any involvement with anybody
from building control?
A. No.

Q. Sorry, by that, do you mean you think you didn't or you
don't remember?
A. No, no, the -- can I just point out that the consultant
in this case, Annabel Sidney, once it took charge of the
contract, they -- their responsibility was to liaison
all relevant information that required building control
contact. So there wouldn't be a need for us to make
contact because it would form a sort of a duplication,
even if we wanted to. So it was always regarded as once
they were given the contract to supervise, they would
handle all the relevant contacts with building control
or any organisation that needed an input.

Q. Just so we can keep it in our minds, then, you say "once
Annabel Sidney took charge" -- that's SBDS again?

A. That's right.

Q. Because they were the consultants, so you would have
expected, in your experience, that they would deal with
any issues relating to building control?

A. That's right. I think the -- a good example of that
would be, like, because we were changing things like
windows and that, you would have to, from 2002, have --

THE CORONER: Well, Mr Smettem, I'm going to stop you there,
because we're going to be dealing with that with other
witnesses.

A. Sorry.

THE CORONER: No, that's all right.

A. I'm one of these people that like to be too helpful.

THE CORONER: No, you're being very helpful. Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Can I ask you about, again, a separate team or
department altogether. Was there something called the
performance and compliance department? I'll just
mention a couple of names that you may recognise,
I don't know: James Partington or James Hemmings(?). Do
you recognise those?

A. Yes, David Partington and -- yes, David Partington in
particular. I knew David Partington.

Q. What was his role, can you remember?

A. He was -- his role was mainly to make sure everything
was dealt with. When I knew David, it was more or less
to make sure the compliance, health and safety, and
there -- although I didn't have a great deal -- when he
actually took up that role, I didn't have a great
deal -- I only knew David Partington when he was
a health and safety officer.

Q. Okay. Was there anything else other than health and
safety which fell under his remit, or was that his main
responsibility?

A. Well, I only had involvement when he was the health and
safety officer.

Q. Do you know whether he or his team were ever involved in
any process to do with fire risk assessment? Was that
something you had any knowledge of?

A. No, I wouldn't have any knowledge of that.

Q. Do you know whether there was anybody employed by
Southwark at that time -- in other words, 2005/2006 --
whose role was to be a fire officer?

A. No.

Q. Did you yourself have any particular responsibilities,
so far as you were aware, relating to the management of
fire risk or making assessments of fire risk, anything
like that?

A. Only -- I can only speak if I was called out on
a particular survey or an inspection of a property in --
in the case of Lakanal House, where there would be cases
where you would have tenants blocking off a fire escape,
means of fire escape, in the large bedroom, for example,
where you would have people putting -- because the rooms
were not that large and people having very large
freestanding wardrobes, for example, there would be
cases where people would block the half -- it was the
half fire escape door in the large master bedroom, and
it would be my job to point out that that was a means of
escape and it should not be blocked.

Q. So if something like that came to your attention, you
would point it out?

A. That's right.

Q. But is it right that it wasn't part of your job to
specifically go around looking for those sorts of
things?
A. No, no. It would just be down to just general common sense.

Q. Who would you report them to if you found something like that?

A. Well in this particular case, if you point it out to the tenant, you naturally assume -- you know, you would point it out and say, "You really need to move it out the way", and obviously point out the purpose of the half door underneath the staircase.

Q. What if there was some problem -- not necessarily at Lakanal House but in any property that you happened to be in -- which you spotted and which you pointed out to the tenant, but which hadn't been fixed? Would you then draw it to the attention of somebody else in Southwark?

A. I would say yes. If there -- if there was a case where, for any reason, the issue was not being progressed back to its original design, you know, like if it was a means of escape, for example, then it would be my job to report it back to, say, a relevant housing officer.

Q. That was what I wanted to ask. Who would you report it back to?

A. Yes, because -- I would report it back to the housing officer concerned and say, "I've pointed this out." Say, for example, if somebody had done some alterations which had actually compromised either health and safety
or means of escape or whatever. I would point it out to
the housing officer and the housing officer would send
off the relevant correspondence on behalf of the
council, pointing that issue out.

Q. And those sorts of housing officers, would they be
people who were part of, for example, the investment
team, or were they part of some other day-to-day housing
team?

A. Up to 2005, the housing itself had, if you like, more
responsibility as far as day-to-day correspondence in
their particular patch, 'cos each housing officer had
a patch to look after. It was -- could be sort of
several hundreds of properties, maybe like 4/500
properties, something like that.

Q. Sorry, what I'm driving at is: were they part of one of
the teams we've already mentioned or was there some
other collection of housing officers who weren't
responsible for refurbishments or investments?

A. They would be another part of the housing team up
to January 2005.

Q. And what about after January 2005?

A. After 2005, they would still -- in the case of
Camberwell, they would still be based at Harris Street,
whereas we were based at Castlemead from January 2005.

But they would still be there, still doing the same
function.

Q. I'd like to move on, then, please, to think about Lakanal specifically. I'm going to ask you first of all about some works that were carried out, as we understand it, before 2006/2007 -- you may be able to help us with them or not, I don't know -- and then to ask you about the Decent Homes works in 2006/2007.

A. All right.

Q. We established earlier, I think, that Lakanal fell within the scope of your role from 1982, when you started to work for Southwark, until 1991?

A. Yeah.

Q. And then again from 1997 onwards. So I'll only ask you about things in those periods.

A. Fine.

Q. The jury have heard that a suspended ceiling was installed in the corridors, the main access corridors at Lakanal House, at some time during the 1980s, and that that ceiling was subsequently changed -- the material it was made out of was changed a little later on in the 1980s. Did you have any involvement in either the installation of that ceiling or the subsequent changes that were made to it?

A. No.

Q. Would you have had, in the course of your general
duties, any involvement in maintaining those ceilings
that you can remember?
A. No, no.
Q. In principle, would maintenance of those ceilings -- for
example, replacing a damaged panel, something like
that -- fall within the scope of your role?
A. It would -- it would come to -- if I was in the building
and I see a panel that had been unscrewed and left,
I would probably get my own screwdriver and put it back,
or I'd report it to someone to actually -- in the
engineering service, because the engineering service for
Southwark were responsible, at that time, to -- for the
complete maintenance of the corridor ceilings.
Q. I suppose it might be that something as simple as
replacing a panel that was damaged would not be the sort
of more complicated or larger scale work that would
require your involvement?
A. That's right.
Q. And would be dealt with directly by a contractor?
A. That's right.
Q. Did you know, in fact, whether the material that those
ceilings were made of was made out of something of
a particular specification? Sorry, I haven't asked that
very well. Did you know what the ceiling was made of,
first of all?
A. No, apart from just the surface, which was like a -- and the actual jointing of it, but not the actual inner core of it, because I've never seen it actually come down, really. So it was limited.

Q. Would you, for example, be made aware that the ceiling was made of a particular material, and therefore if there was a need to repair it or replace parts of it then that had to be done with the same material?

A. No, I was -- like I say, I wasn't aware of all -- all that -- what the panel was completely made of.

Q. Tell us if you can't help us with this, but does it follow from that that as and when there was a need to carry out any repairs, it would be left to the person carrying out the repairs to work out what was needed?

A. That's right, because even with the engineering services having full responsibility for it, any works that they would raise to their respective contractors, it would be in their contract to replace any damaged panels in the course of their works.

Q. Did you, in the 1980s, before the reorganisation, have any opportunity to see above the suspended ceiling, to see what was in the cavity above?

A. No. The first time I've seen those ceilings, the works had already been completed, and the only thing I saw was the resulting debris, you know, because obviously when
(Inaudible) works this thing, they were just in the process of sweeping up after the contract had finished. So really all the work had been done and I never saw inside the ducting at all.

Q. Thinking about the fire which occurred in flat 81 in 1997, obviously after that fire there was a need to rebuild that flat.
A. Mm-hmm.

Q. To put it back into serviceable condition. Is it correct that the fire was in September 1997 but there was a little bit of a delay in getting funding, and so the work wasn't carried out until a little later?
A. That's right.

Q. Could I just ask you about your involvement in that, really. Is it correct that before the works were carried out you had some involvement in discussions about what needed to be done?
A. That's right.

Q. As part of your role?
A. That's right.

Q. And that also once the work was completed, it was part of your job to arrange an inspection afterwards to check that it had been done properly?
A. No, my -- my role in that was to inspect the property, because this -- this property had been left for some
time before we got the funding, the capital funding, and
I was asked to carry an inspection of the property,
because obviously it had been boarded up et cetera. And
what I did was -- I was asked to carry out the
inspection. I carried out the inspection, and obviously
we found out that the internal staircase had completely
gone, and most of the debris, the fire debris, had been
removed, but there was still some still there, some
residue debris, and my job was first to arrange for
a temporary scaffolding to be erected inside, because on
my inspection I found that we had to bring a structural
engineer in because I was concerned that the upstairs
stair -- sorry, the upstairs lounge ceiling, because
of --

Q. I'm sorry to cut you off. I appreciate you remember
obviously a lot of the detail of what the difficulties
were and what had to be done, but again I'm interested
simply in general terms in what aspects of it fell
within your role. You've mentioned to us that you went
to look at what had been done, and you formed the view
that because of the damage to the staircase there was
a need to bring in a surveyor?

A. Exactly.

Q. So this was an example of an occasion when you brought
in external help?
A. Yes, yes.

Q. I've just put a letter on the screen. I just want to ask you, really, one question about it, again just so we get a flavour of your involvement. This is page 855 in the chronological bundles, which is in file number 3. We can see it's a letter addressed to you from a firm of chartered surveyors called Potter Raper. It's a letter dated 8 May 2001, addressed to you, "Major voids refurbishment, 81 Lakanal", and it says:

"As you may be aware, the 12-month defect liability period expires on 11 May 2001."

So it seems that this was after the reinstatement work had been done. Then in that third paragraph:

"Please could you make the necessary arrangements to do an inspection with the occupier to confirm which of the above dates is acceptable."

So you had some involvement then, in going along after the work had been done, to check that it was up to scratch?

A. Yes.

Q. Lastly, then, could I ask you to think about the 2006/2007 work. Is it correct that in September 2004 you had a meeting with Annabel Sidney?

A. That's right.

Q. Who, as we've heard, was part of SBDS. She was, as far
as you knew, in charge of that project, was she?

A. That's right. I was notified by the contracts manager that she would be coming in and she would be taking charge of the Lakanal contract.

Q. I think you discussed a number of aspects of the building which work might potentially be done to. First of all, there was some discussion, was there, about asbestos panels in Lakanal House and whether she should be replaced?

A. That's right.

Q. At that time, so far as you were aware, was the intention that they should be removed and replaced with a composite panel which would have a powder-coated aluminium facing? Do you remember the detail of that?

A. In the case of the asbestos, can I just point out -- can I expand a little bit?

THE CORONER: Well, I don't think we need a detailed discussion of asbestos, thank you, Mr Smettem. If you just focus on Mr Atkins' question.

A. To understand it, you really need to expand a little bit on why -- why we were talking about the asbestos.

THE CORONER: Well, I think that probably there's a general understanding of the problems with asbestos. What I'd like you to do is to focus on Mr Atkins' question.

Do you want to put it again, Mr Atkins?
MR ATKINS: Well, Mr Smettem, what I'll do is identify the different aspects of work that were discussed and you can tell me whether they were discussed and then perhaps we can see whether we need to expand after that.

So there was first of all the question of replacing the panels which formerly had been asbestos?

A. That's right.

Q. There was also discussion, was there, about windows?

A. That's right.

Q. Because previously you had identified that there was a problem in the sister block, Marie Curie, with leaks in the frames which were timber?

A. Yes.

Q. And there was also a problem with some of those frames becoming rotten?

A. That's right.

Q. So in your view there was a good argument for replacing the window frames at Lakanal to avoid the same problems?

A.Exactly.

Q. Is this an example of you being able to use your knowledge and your experience of those blocks to help the consultant to work out what should be done?

A. That's right, yeah.

Q. There were also discussions, I think, about work that needed to be carried out on the roof --
1 A. Yes.
2 Q. -- which we needn't worry about in too much detail.
3 Also a discussion about whether it would be possible to
4 have an extractor fan --
5 A. That's right.
6 Q. -- in the glazed windows and what upgrade work ought to
7 be carried out in the bathrooms.
8 A. That's right.
9 Q. The works, as we know, started in March 2006.
10 A. Yes.
11 Q. There were then a number of meetings that were held from
12 time to time involving the people who had roles to carry
13 out in relation to the works, so there were first of all
14 what were called pre-progress resident meetings, and
15 each day of one of those was held, it would then be
16 followed by a progress meeting. Did you have cause to
17 attend either of those sorts of meetings?
18 A. No, because apart from initial meetings with Annabel
19 under the old neighbourhood system in September 2004 --
20 and obviously, in having some initial conversation with
21 her -- come January 2005, obviously our role changed
22 considerably, so we were totally into repairs and
23 maintenance there. So it meant that whereas under the
24 old neighbourhood system I had more responsibility, more
25 sort of involvement, if you like, come January 2005,
following the reorganisation, all that -- all that
involvement ceased, effectively.

Q. I see. So once the works were underway in March 2006,
really, your involvement had pretty much ended?
A. Exactly.

Q. I think it's right that you were consulted on one
particular question, which was this one about the
extractor fan --
A. That's right.

Q. -- and where it could be placed, but otherwise you were
not involved in making decisions about what work should
be carried out?
A. That's right, exactly.

Q. Madam, might I just have a second, please?

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR ATKINS: Mr Smettem, thank you. Those are all the
questions I have, but if you would be good enough to
wait there, I'm sure others will have questions for you.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hendy.

Questions by MR HENDY

MR HENDY: Mr Smettem, may my name's Hendy. I represent
some of the bereaved families. Just one matter. There
came a time in Lakanal House when security doors were
put in place at the various floors and at the front
doors. Do you remember that happening?
A. Security doors?
Q. Yes.
A. Yes. On each communal passageway, there was an intercom system and all the tenants were given obviously entrance keys et cetera, but people like myself who obviously didn't carry keys, we would have to press the button and wait for the response, for the relevant tenant to let us in.
Q. Can you remember more or less when those security doors were installed?
A. I couldn't be exact, no, sorry.
Q. No. At some point, there was an electronic locking system for the outer door so that if a caller came who wasn't resident in the block, they would have to press the relevant button to communicate with the occupant of the flat that they wanted and the occupant could let them in by means of an answerphone.
A. Yes, in the -- in the main entrance that faced west on the ground floor, there was a -- there was an entry phone system there, where you communicated with the tenant.
Q. Yes.
A. And the tenant could let you in by answerphone.
Q. Can you remember when the entry phone system was put in?
A. Again, I couldn't tell you.
Q. Did you have any involvement with the installation of the --
A. No.
Q. -- entry phone?
A. No, because it would be a -- it would be deemed to be a major upgrading to the block, and that would be outside my rebate.
Q. Were you present when those works or part of them were done?
A. No, no. I mean, I would be covering the area as a building inspector or a technical officer's role, but not as -- have anything to do with the contract.
Q. The wires for the entry phone system ran in the false ceiling and from the false ceiling in the corridors the holes were drilled and the wires were put through into the particular flats. Is that something that you observed or saw at all?
A. No.
Q. Thank you very much.
THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai?
MS AL TAI: No thank you, madam.
THE CORONER: Yes.
Questions by MS CANBY
MS CANBY: Mr Smettem, I'm Fiona Canby and I just have a couple of questions to ask you on behalf of SAPA. We
know that you had some involvement in the refurbishment
of flat 81 after the 1997 fire, and I wondered if
I could take you very quickly to some of the documents
in relation to that. It's the chronological bundle --
I think it's the second folder and it's page 697.

I appreciate, Mr Smettem, that it would be a very
long time since you last saw this document, but this is
the schedule --

THE CORONER: Can you just wait for Mr Smettem to be shown
it. (Handed)

MS CANBY: Mr Smettem, you can see from page 697 that this
is the schedule of works that was produced in relation
to that work on flat 81. If you could turn, please, to
page 699.

A. Yes.

Q. These were the works that in particular were due to be
carried out to the living room and kitchen, and if I can
take you, please, to item F, under the heading "Living
room", and item N, under the heading "Kitchen". You
will see that it was proposed that the window and
balcony door and frames were to be renewed to match
existing, and the balcony doors were said to be
"exterior quality solid door with escape latch on
inside". That's the same for both the living room and
the kitchen. Can you see that, Mr Smettem?
A.  Sorry, can you just repeat that?

Q.  Yes.  If you look under the heading "Living room".

A.  "Living room", yes.

Q.  It's item number F.

A.  Item number F.

Q.  Yes?

A.  Yes.

Q.  And it says:

"Renew window and balcony door and frames to match existing; exterior quality solid door with escape latch on inside."

A.  Yes.

Q.  Then if you do the same exercise for the kitchen and look at item N --

A.  Yes.

Q.  -- you'll see that it's the same specification.

A.  Yes.

Q.  So do you agree that it appears that given that the work was to match existing, both the living room and the kitchen door prior to the fire in 1997 had been the same, and that it looks as if they had been exterior quality solid doors with escape latches on the inside?

A.  Yes.

Q.  Do you have recollection or knowledge more generally as to the fire performance of the balcony doors that were
installed in Lakanal before the 2006/2007 refurbishments took place?

A. You mean before the -- before the major fire?

Q. No. I'm now moving from 1997. We know that the balcony doors were replaced in the refurbishment works in 2006 to 2007, but what I'm interested in is whether or not you know that the balcony doors themselves before 2006/2007, so the living room and kitchen doors, were fire doors.

A. I believe so.

Q. You believe so?

A. Yeah.

Q. You're basing that on the fact that they had self-closing mechanisms, as far as you're aware?

A. As I understand it, they had a latch detail.

Q. Would that be the escape latch that we see referenced here?

A. Yes.

Q. But you appreciate that the escape latch is the means for the resident to get out of the door rather than the self-closing mechanism, which is something different, which is the means for the door to close behind you once you've left?

A. I'm not sure about -- I cannot recall the actual -- whether it had a self-closer.
Q. No.
A. It was just the fact that I knew about the -- the means of escape, the handle. When they pressed the handle down, they were straight out.
Q. So that would be the escape latch that we've seen referenced on this document which is still on the screen?
A. Mmm.
Q. Yes. Did you have any knowledge about the fire-resisting properties of either of those balcony doors?
A. No, no. All I would understand is that they had a fire check capability or a fire resistant capability.
Q. So your understanding was that both doors had some form of fire-resisting quality?
A. Exactly.
Q. So as far as you were concerned, before the 2006/2007 refurbishments, there was no difference in either of those balcony doors?
A. Exactly, yes.
Q. Just one very short last topic, please, Mr Smettem. You've told the jury that when a property was identified for a major refurbishment, you would often meet with the consultant to discuss the history of the block, and you've told the jury that by "consultant" you mean SBDS.
Q. You told the jury that you met with Annabel Sidney in about September 2004 in relation to the major refurbishments.

A. That's right.

Q. Did you have any discussions with her in that meeting about the history of the block?

A. Yes.

Q. Did any of those discussions relate to either fire safety or the particular fire performance of any of the materials within Lakanal House?

A. No, it was -- can I expand on that?

Q. Just shortly, please, thank you.

A. Shortly. It was mainly to -- to tell about the historical problems that we had on an earlier project on the sister block, Marie Curie.

Q. And that was in relation to the asbestos panels that you've already referred to?

A. And that was related to the asbestos problems we had with Marie Curie.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr Smettem.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR MATTHEWS: I have no further questions.

THE CORONER: Sorry, I was just waiting for Mr Matthews, but did you want to say something before that, Mr Atkins?
MR ATKINS: Madam, no.

THE CORONER: Mr Matthews, did you want to put any questions to this witness?

MR MATTHEWS: No thank you.

THE CORONER: Members of the jury, do you have any questions? Thank you.

Questions by the Coroner

THE CORONER: Mr Smettem, in answer to Miss Canby, you've just said that you thought that the balcony doors after the earlier fire reconstruction had fire-resisting properties.

A. Mm-hmm.

THE CORONER: What makes you say that? How can you be confident of that?

A. It's -- it was just the thickness of a door, because if a door is, like, 44 millimetres thick or more, it tended to be more what we call a fire check door. So my -- my knowledge in the building industry -- and also the weight of the door. You can usually tell that if a door's very heavy it has, if you like, a built-in fire resistance capability.

THE CORONER: Right, so it was your experience which suggested that that was the case, rather than your knowledge of the particular specification of the doors which had been fitted?
A. Although I might not know exactly what's inside the door, you usually -- obviously there would be times where I would put my tape measure on the door and I would say, "44-millimetre." And also maybe sometimes there would be times when maybe some doors come off or are loosened and I've lifted it myself, and it's -- a fire check door --

THE CORONER: Let me have just stop you there. You made the assumption on the dimensions and the weight of the door and --

A. And not --

THE CORONER: Can you just let me finish putting it to you. So you made your assumptions based on the dimensions and the weight of the door, and not on your knowledge of the specifications; is that correct?

A. That's right.

THE CORONER: Mr Smettem, thank you very much for coming and thank you for the help that you've given us. You're welcome to stay if you would like, but you're free to go if you would prefer.

A. Thank you.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew)

Yes, thank you, Mr Atkins. Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Madam, Mr Smettem is the last witness who's
scheduled to give live evidence today. In view of the
time, that may be a good place to draw stumps for the
day.

THE CORONER: Right. There was a suggestion that we might
read some statements. Is that not --

MR ATKINS: Madam, we can if there's time, there are two
statements from firefighters we could read now.

THE CORONER: Would that be a sensible -- it would seem to
me to be a sensible course.

Members of the jury, if you're willing and think it
a sensible way forward, we could ask Mr Atkins or
Mr Maxwell-Scott to read the two statements now, which
will mean having a later break for lunch, but then
you'll be free for the rest of the afternoon, so I think
that if you're all willing, it would be a sensible way
to go forward to deal with that now, and then you'll be
completely free.

So yes, please, let's do that, thank you. Sorry,
Mr Hendy.

MR HENDY: Madam, might I just have a word with Mr Atkins
for a moment?

THE CORONER: Yes, of course. (Pause)

MR HENDY: Thank you, madam.

MR ATKINS: Madam, there are two statements to be read. The
first is from Trevor John Chapman, who is a temporary
watch manager, and the statement is dated 14 August 2009, and it is at page 264, originally in the bundle of witnesses to be called.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Is it going to be possible to put that on the screen, please, Mr Atkins, while you're reading? That would be helpful.

MR ATKINS: Yes, madam. It is on the screen now.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

Witness statement of TREVOR CHAPMAN read

MR ATKINS: Mr Chapman says:

"I'm currently employed by the London Fire Brigade as a crew manager and have held this position for 16 years. I have worked in the Fire Brigade for 21 and a half years. I'm usually based at Mitcham fire station.

"On Friday, 3 July 2009 I was working as the temporary watch manager for Green Watch at West Norwood. I was working a day shift. That shift I was riding a pump ladder appliance call sign H251. Also riding the appliance were Firefighter Cloke, Firefighter Godfrey and Firefighter Corbett.

"At approximately 1640 our appliance was directed to go to E37, Peckham Fire Station, as standby. While en route we listened to the radio communications regarding a fire incident that was occurring at Lakanal House in
Camberwell. While still en route to Peckham at 17.07, the fire was upgraded to a 12-pump fire and our appliance was directed to attend.

"We approached the incident from Peckham High Road and parked our appliance about 20 yards up Havil Street. There were already numerous LFB appliances parked down the street. From the east where Lakanal House was we could already see plumes of smoke issuing. We made our way to the command unit parked further north on Havil Street after donning PPE.

"The officers at the CU appeared extremely busy and we were waiting approximately five minutes for a BM [which is a brigade manager, we think] to become free. He told us to put on our BA equipment, standard duration, and make our way to the BA entry control situated on the east side of Lakanal House.

"We returned to our appliance and put on our BA equipment. We walked down Dalwood Road to make our way to BA entry control. As Lakanal House came into view, I could see on the west side visible fires at several sites. There was smoke issuing from multiple floors on the west side and from the north side. We were making our way quickly around to BA entry control so I didn't have time to assess the full scale of the incident but it was clear incidents were occurring on three or four
floors. In Dalwood Road, a car had been overturned to allow an ALP to get into position on the north east corner of the building.

"The BA control was situated on the courtyard about 10 yards back from the main entrance to the building. We reported to the incident commander. I think he was of GM rank. He told us to stand by and await instructions. There were several other BA crews waiting to be deployed into the building. The incident commander was working his way through the crews, briefing them before they entered. I could also see other crews leaving the building.

"Because it was a hot summer's day I ordered my crew to sit down and take on water to ensure they were hydrated. After about ten minutes we were called up and told to take additional hose up to the 11th floor. There was a 45-millimetre jet already being used up there, but they needed to extend it further down the corridor. We started up our BA sets outside the building and made our way up the stairs to the 11th floor, taking additional 45-millimetre hose.

"As we reached the 11th floor, we passed a BA crew leaving the floor. A charged hose was already in place running from a dry riser on a lower floor. The 11th floor opened up into the lobby area. Two or corridors
ran off it to the left, south, and the right, north.
The door to the left was shut. The charged hose ran
through the door on the right. I could see that there
was a severe fire situation about five to ten yards down
that corridor. There was fire in the corridor and in
the box sections overhead. We couldn't see to the other
end of the corridor due to the fire conditions. The
visibility was about ten metres, so it was apparent that
there was venting somewhere along the corridor.

"I order the three firefighters I was with to use
the charged house and continue fighting fire. Due to
its intensity I wanted to keep putting water on it.
I then tried to sort out a closer dry riser to attach
our additional hose so that we could extend it. I found
a dry riser on the 11th floor. However, the outlet was
covered by a metal box with a padlock on. It looked as
if it had been attached fairly recently. On the way up
I had noticed an enforcer lying about three floor down.
I let one of the firefighters know where I was going and
went and got it.

"I used the enforcer to smash off the padlock and
gain entry to the dry riser outlet. I charged up our
hose from it and took it through to the rest of crew in
the north corridor. They took up the new line and
started working their way down the corridor, putting out
the fire as they went. The corridor was fairly narrow
and the firefighters went two abreast with one
following. I picked up the other hose and used it to
apply water to the ceiling, as there was still fire
rolling overhead.

"We worked our way down the corridor, past two flats
on the left-hand side. The first flat had been fire
damaged to the extent that I could see into it from the
corridor. The second flat appeared to be intact.

"Progress was slow working our way forward and we
needed to leave soon after because our low pressure
whistles began to sound. One of the firefighters
informed BA control of this via channel 6. He also
stated that a gas main had ruptured up ahead a little
further down the corridor. I had been unaware of this
because I was at the back. We laid down the charge
hoses and withdrew.

"As we reached the stop of the stairs we passed a BA
crew coming up the stairs to continue fighting the fire.
We went back down to BA entry control and debriefed the
incident commander of the situation. One of the
firefighters explained the circumstances of the gas main
rupture.

"It was either at this point or perhaps when I had
been at the BA entry control earlier that I noticed
a line of bed sheets tied together hanging from one of the upper floors on the north side of the building. At later points in the incident, I noticed people on the balconies towards the south of the building still inside.

"I ordered the three firefighters I was with to go clean air, rehydrate and get their BA sets off. They went off and I didn't see them again until the end of the incident when we were relieved. I took off my set and left it out of the way, a short distance from the entry control. I then returned to the incident commander to see if I could assist.

"I arranged for enforcers and drinking water to be taken up to the bridgehead that had been established on the 3rd floor. I then acted as the liaison between the incident commander positioned at the east side BA entry control and the bridgehead, assisting where I could.

"Whilst I was at the bridgehead, I heard a radio transmission on channel 6 that a BA crew had discovered casualties on the 11th floor and were bringing them down."

Madam, just to explain, I shan't put the next page up to the screen but I will read from it:

"I know how difficult it is to carry a casualty when wearing BA so immediately ran up the stairs to go and
assist. I wasn't wearing BA but had a disposable breathing mask that I put on as I went up. I was aware that there was someone behind me also going up and handed the mask backwards, but I don't know who it was or how far up they went.

"As I reached the 11th, I saw two BA users struggling to carry an unconscious female. One was holding her armpits and the other her legs. Due to their BA sets they were unable to put her on their shoulders ... I knelt down in front of them so they could place the female over my shoulders. She was placed across my shoulders so I could put my right arm through her legs and grip one of her arms, leaving my left arm free. This is a standard firefighters carrying technique.

"I then ran down the stairs carrying the female. On the 10th floor, I took off my helmet and dropped it there because it was getting knocked over my eyes. On approximate the 6th or 7th floor, I encountered a paramedic on the stairs. I don't know if he had BA on or not. All I can remember is he was dressed in green. Almost without stopping, I swung around so he could assess the casualty. He looked at her and told me to take her straight down to ground level. I passed by the bridgehead and got to the main entrance where two
firefighters assisted me to put other on the trolley.

"Immediately the LAS were on hand to treat her.

I turned away to catch my breath to the side and when I turned back the trolley was surrounded by LAS staff.

I went back to the bridgehead before collecting my helmet from the 10th floor."

THE CORONER: Thank you.

MR ATKINS: Madam, then the statement continues on the page I put on the screen. Mr Chapman says:

"I remained at the bridgehead for the rest of my time at the incident, still acting as liaison between the bridgehead and incident commander. I'm not sure when but I was later informed that our appliance had been relieved. I met the rest of my crew just outside the main entrance. We took on refreshments, collected our role boards from the command unit and went back to West Norwood at about 2100."

Madam, that's the end of the statement.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

MR ATKINS: The second statement to be read is that of Firefighter Simon Chapman. It's dated 11 July 2009 and is at page 348, and I've put that up on the screen.

THE CORONER: Thank you.
Witness statement of SIMON CHAPMAN read

MR ATKINS: In his statement Simon Chapman says:

"I'm employed by the London Fire Service and have been a serving firefighter for 22 years. I am based at Southwark fire station which is called E33. I am an operational firefighter attached to Green Watch.

"On Friday 3 July 2009 I was working on a day shift out of Southwark fire station. These hours are 9 am to 6 pm. Whilst at the station I was mobilised to a six-pump persons reported fire on the 9th floor of Lakanal House, Havil Street, SE5. This call came in at 4.39 pm. I recall that I had attended this particular block of flats during my service, possibly on more than two occasions, but definitely recall going there due to flooding in the block.

"My role during this shift was the driver of E33 [I think that should be E331], which is a pump ladder, along with four other colleagues on this vehicle. My colleagues on this day were Watch Manager Chris Payton, Crew Manager Alan Thomas, Firefighter Andrew Gray and Firefighter Robert Smith.

"Not long after leaving the fire station I heard a message on the radio saying that they had 10 per cent of the 9th, 10th and 11th floors alight and about a minute later the radio said they had 10 per cent of
the 12th floor alight. This radio message came from
other firefighters who were in attendance at the scene.
During this interview, I will be referring to a pack of
photographs and maps provided by the LFB.

"I drove along Havil street, Peckham, in a southerly
direction and I parked up just past Dalwood Street close
to the command unit. I was listening to the mainframe
radio, which is on the appliance, to a message from my
control, and the fire ground handheld radio, and
overheard the control had an urgent message to say that
there were people trapped in flat 57 and on the handheld
that the officer in charge required three more breathing
apparatus crews. The three colleagues in the back of my
appliance put their breathing apparatus sets on and
headed towards the fire. I was aware also that my watch
manager left the appliance with the role call board.

"When I initially arrived, I could see a well
developed fire on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th to the 12th
floors of this block of flats. I parked up my
appliance, put my fire gear on then put on my breathing
apparatus, and made my way over to the officer in charge
of the incident, Watch Manager John Howling, and joined
my crew. We were standing on grass opposite Lakanal
flats on the Havil Street side.

"Watch Manager Howling ordered us to make up three
teams of breathing apparatus and to collect as much 45 mm hose and branches as we could possibly carry and then when we had done this to report back to him so he could give us further direction. The nearest two appliances were parked in Dalwood Street, and we collected these items from these appliances and returned to Watch Manager Howling.

"At this point Station Manager Paul Cartwright arrived at the scene and he took Watch Manager Howling to one side and said that he was taking over command of the scene. He told us to wait, but while Watch Manager Howling briefed Station Manager Cartwright, I decided to preempt the next order and made my way towards the building, taking my three colleagues with me, because I had heard over my personal radio that extra breathing apparatus wearers were urgently required at the bridgehead, which was located on the 7th floor. The bridgehead is a muster point which is set up usually two floors below the seat of a fire at a high rise incident.

"Myself and my three other colleagues climbed into the lift with the intention of going to the 7th floor bridgehead. We took with us three lengths of hose, a branch and 12 bottles of water. As we entered the lift I heard over the radio that the bridgehead was going to be moved down to the 2nd floor. I decided to
go to the 5th floor to assist the crew with bringing the bridgehead down and to protect the stairwell because the fire was below them.

"When we got to the 5th floor there was a little bit of smoke and we were met by station officer Foster. He ordered us to go down a couple of floors and locate a floor without any smoke. We got down to the 3rd floor. Other crews came down to the 3rd and other crews came up to the 3rd, so we all gathered at this point. I could see smoke was being drawn down the stairs and a decision was made to relocate outside to the east of the building. Myself and my colleagues used the stairs to exit the building.

"There was a BA control set up under the big tree to the east of the building. The rest of my crew were ordered to return to the building on different floors. They were part of two crews. Watch Manager Payton ordered me to make sure that BA control had been set up correctly, and to collect all the necessary equipment, ie more hose, more branches and sledgehammers, and forced entry equipment. This took about ten minutes.

"I then returned to BA control, situated under the tree on the east side of the building. I had no specific task, but saw two firefighters on the west side of the building setting up a ground monitor. I went
over and assisted them, and then under the direction of
Section Commander Cartwright I used the monitor to
suppress the fire on the 5th, 6th and 7th floors to stop
it spreading to other flats, because the flames were
coming out of these windows and rolling up towards the
windows above. A ground monitor is a self contained
free standing jet supplied by one length of hose, and is
capable of projecting water up to a level of the 9th
floor. We were using this on the 7th floor.

"At this stage, an ALP (aerial ladder platform) was
reversing in down the side of the building on the west
side. I assisted setting up the supply pump and water
supplies for them. I then returned to BA control as on
the radio they were requesting more BA wearers.
I didn't get there because a BA wearer came out of the
building and handed me a black child aged about 3 to
4 years. This child was crying and possibly could have
been suffering from smoke inhalation. I took the child
over to the LAS triage area which was set up on the east
side of the building. This child's father and sister
were delivered to this area at the same time. They were
all showing signs of smoke inhalation.

"I asked the father what flat he was from and he
said 81 but that they lived in flat 80. I then asked
him if there was anyone else in the flat, and he said
yes, that there was a woman and at least one child, and
the impression I had was that his wife or partner was
still inside the building. I gave this information to
Station Manager Paul Glenny, who was collating
information on casualties and locations.

"Soon after this I saw another crew brought out of
the building a black woman who was hysterical because
she was unable to locate her family. I asked her what
flat she was from and to describe her family for me.
She described the three people who I had just dealt with
at triage, and then told her that they were out and the
ambulance crew had taken them to hospital but that they
were okay.

"I was then asked by Watch Manager Payton to come to
the bridgehead, which by now had moved back to the 3rd
floor, and to bring a load of equipment. They wanted
thermal image cameras. I collected three and made my
way up to the bridgehead. I was then tasked to be
a runner for the bridgehead, liaising with
Watch Manager Payton on anything he needed.

"An EDBA team (this means extended duration
breathing apparatus) came down from I believe the 11th
floor with one of their crew in distress, and a group
manager, whose name I don't know, gave him oxygen,
removed his tunic and tried to cool him down using half
a dozen bottles of water and decided to assist him out of the building to cool down, and as he was unable to stand we carried him down to the triage area outside. His name was firefighter Chris Ross, I believe. He's stationed at Clerkenwell.

"I assisted with the ambulance crew for about ten minutes and then made my way back up to the bridgehead. During all of this I was up and down the stairs several times taking equipment to and from this area. At some point again while I was at the bridgehead I was handed an Asian looking child of about 3 or 4 years along with another colleague who was holding a baby. We carried these children out of the building to the triage area. This had now relocated under cover in a block of flats to the west of Lakanal. Both of these children were suffering minor smoke inhalation.

"As I returned to the scene, I noticed two or three elderly Asian adults being led by ambulance crew to the triage area. I then made my way back to the bridgehead. "At some point during this incident I was tasked along with another colleague to go up above the bridgehead to meet a BA crew coming down with four adults and a dog. It was about the 9th floor when we met them. There was a white middle aged man with a dog, an elderly white couple and a black male, again middle
aged, who liked like a Rastafarian. We accompanied the
colleagues to safety.

"I had been tasked with another colleague to make
a record of anyone that went above the bridgehead who
wasn't bearing breathing apparatus, their names,
locations, and times that they went up. This was
carried out by writing names with a Chinagraph pencil on
the wall, which is subsequently photographed. This then
keeps a running record of colleagues who are in the
building above the bridgehead. I know at this stage it
was approximately 8 pm that this was set up. I am
unable to time events before this due to the numerous
tasks and speed with which things were happening during
this incident.

"At approximately 9.20 pm, I was asked by
Group Manager Andrews, who was in charge of the
bridgehead, to record for him the situation above the
bridgehead. This included the conditions of the
building, heat and smoke et cetera, how much of the
building was damaged, what was still alight and where
and what tasks the BA crews were carrying out.
I completed this task and passed on this information to
Group Manager Andrews.

"I had been informed that we were being relieved
from the scene. Having completed the tasks I then made
my way back my appliance. I believe we returned to
Southwark fire station just before 10 pm."

Madam, that's the end of his account of what
happened on the day of the fire.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Yes, Mr Hendy.

MR HENDY: Madam, can I just raise one matter. In relation
to the statement of Trevor Chapman, which Mr Atkins read
first, he very delicately didn't give the description of
the lady that Mr Chapman carried downstairs, entirely
understandable, but in doing so he didn't identify the
lady, and the jury would probably want to know, I've
spoken to Mr Dowden about this and there's no
controversy, that the lady was Dayana Francisquini.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much for clarifying that,
that's very helpful. Thank you, Mr Hendy.

Yes, that's all of the evidence that we shall be
dealing with today, members of the jury, so you're
welcome to go and please be back for 10 o'clock tomorrow
morning. Thank you very much.

(In the absence of the Jury)

Housekeeping

THE CORONER: Yes, just a couple of things then before we go
our separate ways this afternoon. Mr Maxwell-Scott, the
plan for tomorrow, is that as set out on the timetable?

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MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes. On the timetable, we have Ejovi Awaritefe and Charles Pearce to give evidence, and they are expected to attend tomorrow. After we finish in court today I'm going to have a discussion with those representing the London Borough of Southwark about the witnesses scheduled for Friday.

So there's no secret about it, it may be suggested that Mr Adewalure will be unable to provide any particular assistance to the court, and certainly from his statements there is nothing in them to suggest any particular direct involvement in the issues we are interested in, so if it is the case that he's not going to be able to provide more general assistance then I will be reviewing whether he is required as a witness.

I will also be discussing in such circumstances whether it might be possible for Mr Edwards to be available tomorrow, thereby perhaps creating a free day on Friday. That sort of discussion is taking place, so it's therefore possible that Mr Edwards will be added to the list tomorrow.

There are also in any event some statements to be read to be caught up on.

THE CORONER: All right. Well that's helpful, thank you very much.

There are two matters I think that I'm aware of that
are outstanding. One concerns the question of the recording of Catherine Hickman’s telephone conversation, and I think you're all aware I've just sent round by email some points on that, so I'm just waiting to have responses once you have had a chance to look at that email, so it does not need to be dealt with now.

The second concerns the application which Mr Hendy is making for evidence from Mr King to be called, and I'm just waiting for submissions from everybody on that. So again I don't need to deal with that now, but those are both outstanding at the moment.

Then I just wanted to add one further point -- sorry, Mr Compton, you wanted to say something on that?

MR COMPTON: Simply, madam, I wonder if you'd just extend the response time in respect of Mr King. I think that might be helpful to all of us. I see Mr Hendy nodding.

THE CORONER: Of course, yes. That's fine. What are you suggesting?

MR COMPTON: Well I wonder if we could extend it perhaps until, I hope I'm not asking for too long if one was to say Friday. There may be a reason for this, and I think if we look at this together to assist you as to the parameters of the report, where it strays into other territory, and whether there may be another fire officer of sufficient similar type of experience who could take
the role. I'm not in a position to give you any more
information at the moment, but I think we are working on
that and I think that would be very helpful to us at the
bar.

THE CORONER: Mr Hendy?

MR HENDY: Madam, just to say you already have our
submissions, I think.

THE CORONER: Thank you, yes I have.

MR HENDY: But I wonder whether it might not be more
sensible to extend the time until Monday, particularly
if Mr Maxwell-Scott's hope of a free Friday comes about.
The expert that's currently scheduled, Mr Davey, is
quite a long way away, so it wouldn't appear to be
a desperately urgent matter, and there are some
discussions taking place which might assist you.

THE CORONER: Well that sounds sensible. I'm happy to
extend that time limit until Monday then, so that's
fine, and just let me know at an appropriate time where
you are with discussions. That would be very helpful.

Could I just ask whether any other teams are going
to make a similar application in respect of any expert
evidence? It would help us to know.

MR COMPTON: I don't think, if there is an application on
behalf of Apollo, it won't be to duplicate, it will be
to replace. I hope that makes it clear. We certainly
wouldn't be serving a report from an expert as an additional report. I think the court has enough expert reports at the moment. But that would be the discussions I'm having with Mr Hendy, to see if there's another perhaps more suitable person.

THE CORONER: Okay, thank you very much. Was someone else wanting to make a point on that? All right. Thank you. Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Just two housekeeping matters for those who didn't have the opportunity to check their emails very shortly before coming into court this morning. They relate to the points which you raised, madam, firstly about Catherine Hickman's 999 call. The effect of the emails was that people have the opportunity to make representations and the opportunity to listen to the tape in order to enable them properly to do so.

What we have said is that anyone who might wish to make representations, might wish to have the tape, should let us know before they leave today. We are not going to provide the tapes automatically. They are all available and we will burn such tapes as are requested, and they will be numbered copies and the expectation is that they will be returned once people have had the opportunity to consider them. So anyone who wants one is entitled to have one, but they will need personally
to ask for it.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Yes, I sent an email round to that effect just before we began today, so that's helpful, thank you.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Then the second point in relation to Mr Hendy's application is that I sent by email the references for five cases which may be of potential relevance in identifying some applicable legal principles.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Well it may well be that again, given that we might have a full day tomorrow, it may be the sensible thing that we actually come back to that on Monday, if Friday's going to be a free day, yes.

All right, thank you very much. Any other points to raise before tomorrow?

All right, well thank you all very much and thank you for staying late so that we can now finish for the day. Thank you.

(1.28 pm)

(The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day)

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read
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