

Grenfell: The first 35 minutes

Caution: This contains material and images that may be upsetting or triggering.

The Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 Report divides the timeline of what happened into 11 time periods, with each time period exploring separately the spread of fire, events on the incident ground, conditions in the tower and the movement of occupants, events in the control room and the actions of the MPS, LAS (London Ambulance Service), RBKC and the TMO.

The following summarises key points of the first 35 minutes into a single timeline. This was created as research and am sharing in this form as some will be interested. It has not been carefully edited. It is not highly technical. I am trying for myself to piece together what happened so I can better understand the context people were operating in.

All of this is taken from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report: Part 2 pages 79 – 201.

Errors are all mine.

At the outset let me reiterate that I in no way blame the firefighters on the night.

<https://grenfellenquirer.blog/2019/02/25/grenfell-did-the-fire-brigade-fail-reflections-on-dispatches/>

Colours:

Residents movements

Specific Firefighter activities

Specific Control Room activities

Period 1: 00:54 – 01:30 The initial fire, the development of the exterior fire and the LFB's initial response

Time	What happened
00:54	<p>297 people (residents and visitors) are in the 129 flats in the tower. 7 flats were empty. 67 of those present were children under 18. Mr Kebede from Flat 16 on the 4th floor calls 999 to report a fire. He had returned home at 23:30, went to sleep and been woken by a 'beeping' noise, on investigation he found smoke in the kitchen, got his mobile, woke his flat mates and called 999. He alerts neighbours on the way out.</p>

00:55	3 appliances mobilised. The documentation for the building (Operational Risk Database) had no plans for the tower, inaccurate information about the number of floors, no tactical plan and no operational contingency plan.
00:59	First 3 appliances arrive and begin connecting equipment to the dry risers. 4 th appliance mobilised as realise it's a high-rise building (HRB) Watch Manager Dowden becomes the Incident Commander as the most senior officer. He remains outside to monitor the fire.
01:01	Firefighters (FF) enter the building. They do not have electric fobs and are let in by resident Maria Alves who was at the front entrance. She uses the intercom system to call her husband in their flat to tell him of the fire.
01:02	FF fail to gain control of the lift. They use it to go to Floor 2 to set up the bridgehead. 2 FF sent to fight the fire on floor 4
01:06	WM Dowden says fire has breached Flat 16's window and that he wants a covering jet directed at the window. He's advised against doing this as water could enter the window and scald the FF inside. FF do prepare a jet, but it is not operational until 01:15.
01:07	FF O'Beirne goes to floor 5 where he meets a family of four who tell him Flat 26 (directly above flat 16) is on fire.
01:08	WM O'Keefe arrives in fourth appliance. Dowden asks O'Keefe to assume command of the bridgehead.

01:09 – FFs Browne and Batterbee enter Flat 14. They enter bedroom 1,
01:15 bedroom 2 and make their way to the kitchen.
They enter the kitchen at 01:15

The fire continued to grow externally.
By the time the FF entered the kitchen at 01:15 external flames were extending two floors above Flat 16 to Floor 6. (10.42)

The image on the right shows the flames at 01:13 (10.61)



01:15 Request sent to make pumps 6 and send an aerial appliance. This is the first communication the Control Room has had from the incident.
This unleashed more resources, including a fire investigation unit (FIU); two command units (CUs), 3 Watch Managers and 2 Station Managers, a Group Manager attending. As Monitoring Officer, a Press Liaison Officer, a Fire Safety Officer and a Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) as the remote monitoring officer.

The covering jet is directed at the outside of the building below the window.

WM Dowden begins to feel uncomfortable about the development of the fire but still feels it can be contained by the covering jet. (10:64 – 10:65)

01:14 – **Control Room.**
01:30

The 'back up control room' in Stratford was in use. This room was smaller and did not have two TV screens – one showing 24-hour news and one the NPAS link from helicopters.

At 01:14 (Control Room Operators) a CRO receives a message from the incident saying that the fire was on floor 4. Most of the CRO's see this message. The control room does not receive another informative message about the incident until 02:39 (1 hour and 25 minutes later). This sometimes happens when further make up messages have been sent.

OM (Operational Manager) was not concerned even when pumps were increased to 8.

The Senior Operational Manager (SOM) and Assistant Commissioner(AC) should have been paged at 01:20 but they were not. Deputy AC was paged to act as remote monitoring officer (should have been AC).

Between 01:24 and 01:30 the CR receive 20 calls from people trapped in the building and members of the public. OM Norman instructs AOM's not to answer calls but to focus on mobilizing resources to the incident and to help her manage the incident.

Despite numerous calls from the public saying a whole block was on fire none of this was recorded on the incident log and CRO's did not communicate it to each other by any other means. There was no system for collating information so that all CRO's would be able to understand the extent of smoke and spread.

At this point OM said that 'all hell broke loose' she thought the fire might be spreading. At around 01:25 SM was paged to attend. All operators are on calls and OM Norman decides to take calls and is on the phone from 01:25 to 01:33.

The 'persons reported' message at 01:28 changes things in the CR. CRO Gotts recalls thinking this will be worse than Lakanal.

01:16 – 01:18 FF Badillo meets a group on Floor 3 who appear to be suffering from smoke exposure. They say they have come from Floors 5 and 6.

FF O'Beirne tells WM Dowden the kitchen of Flat 26 was on fire and that FF were need a crew to fight the fire. Dowden doesn't recall receiving the message. O'Beirne doesn't contact the bridgehead.

FF's are sent to floor 5 but without equipment to fight a fire. Simply for reconnaissance.

FF meets group on floor 6 who say Flat 36 is on fire (2 floors above the original fire). The FF goes into the flat and sees a wall of black smoke.

01:18 A total of **35 people** have left the tower at this point. 10 of these are from floor 12 and 13.

In total 227 escaped and 71 died (including still-born Logan Isaac Gomez) Pili Burton died several months later, she is counted in the 72 deaths but did not die that night.

No system is in place to count the people leaving.

There are reports of varying internal conditions and people speak of the ventilation system making strange sounds. One resident called the TMO to report this saying it sounded like a vacuum cleaner.

01:19 Dowden sends a message to the control room to make pumps 8.

This meant that an FRU was dispatched which carried Extended Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) Dowden says it as this time that he first realized the outside of the building was on fire, but still felt the fire could be controlled. He had not considered the risk of the fire breaking back into the building and had not received information about the fires in flat 26 and 36. He had not considered a mass evacuation. (10.74 - 77)

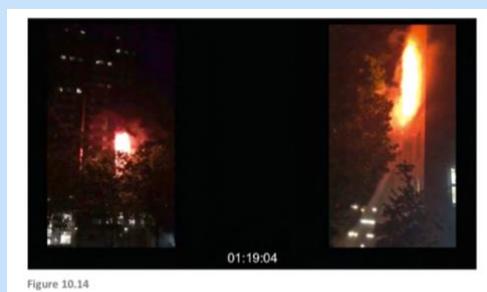


Figure 10.14

O'Keefe said that he had discussed a strategy for multiple rescues with Dowden but not a mass evacuation.

01:21

- Call 1 from Resident:
The first resident from the tower called the control room. The control room had received calls from the public prior to this, but this was the first call from within the tower. **Naomi Li** from floor 22 said she could smell smoke, but none was in her flat. She was advised to stay put and keep her door shut. She was told the fire was on the 4th floor.

She went to tell her neighbours. A neighbour **Mariem Elgwahry** said 'It's in our kitchen. Mariem and her mother **Eslah Elgwahry** opened the stairwell. Naomi thought they were going down. They both died in the fire. Mariem in a call to a friend said they had tried to go down but people had come up telling them to go up and stay inside.

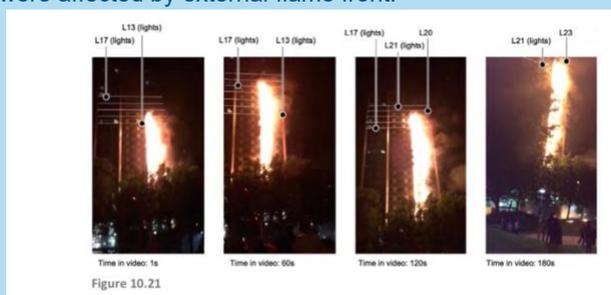
- Naomi also spoke to **Tony Disson** who went back into his flat. Tony also died.
- Naomi and Lydia Liao (Naomi's cousin) entered the stairwell and found a group of people going upstairs. She assumed they were going to the roof. There was no space for them to descend. They went back into the lobby and entered the flat of Nadia Choucair and her family in flat 193. The Choucair family all died. **Nadia, Bassem, Mierna, Fatima and Zainab.** Naomi and her cousin survived, leaving the building 2 hours later at 03:21.

- At around this time, **Fadumo Ahmed** from Flat 164 on floor 19 received a call alerting her to the fire. She gathered her things and left. She met Debbie Lamprell who lived in flat 161 near the lifts. Debbie said people were going upstairs, Fadumo thought the instructions were to go upstairs. They went into the stairwell and walked up to floor 23 where the conditions were worse. She went into Flat 201 with a group including **Debbie Lamprell; Gary Maunders; Amal Ahmedin and her daughter Amaya Tuccu Ahmedin, Amna Idris; Raymond (Moses) Bernhard; Berkti Hafton and her son Biruk Haftom**. Fadumo later left the flat and eventually exited the building at 02:25. The rest of the group in flat 201 died in the fire.

01:20 – The rate of the fire spread increased dramatically.

01:30 By 1:20 approximately seven 'flat 6's' were affected by external flame front.

Between 01:20 and 01:30 this increased dramatically. At the beginning it was at the top of floor 10, within 90 seconds it was at the top of floor 12. Large burning panels were detaching themselves and spiraling to the ground. Between 01:23 and 01:26 the fire spread at four stories a minute. By 01:26 it had spread 19 floors in 14 minutes.



By 01:27 there was continuous flaming at the top of the crown.

At 01:28 the fire was spreading horizontally between the joints of the ACM column panels, as a result of melting and burning PE dripping and collecting on the ledge creating by the column cassette. Joining detail.

The fire starts to spread around columns at lower levels.

FF Cornelius who fought the fire out of the window in Flat 16 said. *'it appeared as if the fire was spreading under the paneling and the cladding... it wasn't necessarily the actual cladding that I could see alight; it was the areas around it'*.

01:20 – FF activity Inside the building 01:28

Meanwhile in **Flat 16**.

FF 'knocks out the fire' on the fridge/freezer, the two FF then notice flames outside the window. They direct jets to the external flame to no effect.

The two FF in Flat 14 are replaced by FF (O'Hanlon and Barton) as their Breathing Apparatus (BA) are low on air. They continue to direct flames at the flames out the window to no effect. They run low on air and the 'end of wear' on BA sets are recorded as 01:35 and 01:36 respectively.

In **Flat 26** (floor 5) two FFs advised people in Flat 25 to leave and forced their way into flat 26 and a thick plume of smoke came out of the flat. Visibility was zero. FF said he became concerned as a tower block fire should not spread in this way. Residents remained in 3 flats on the fifth floor. The FF think they knocked on all doors, but in flat 23 Rebin Samir and his friend Milad Kareem were still in the flat. They were eventually rescued through the window by the aerial ladder at 02:20.

In **Flat 36** (floor 6) FF's describe the lobby as smoke logged. Having helped residents in stairways went into Flat 36 and found it smoke-logged. They called the bridgehead to tell them of conditions and left the flat.

And **otherwhere** in the building

FF got to floor 7 and were told by residents that their flat was on fire. FF attempted to contact Dowden by radio but received no response.

Jose Vieiro from **Flat 46** (Floor 7) gave evidence about seeing the fire enter his flat through the kitchen extractor fan and the window falling inward. He says the entire windowsill was melting. (10.172) Similar evidence is given by others on higher floors.

There are varying reports of residents and FF alerting people and leaving. Varying conditions are reported in lobbies, flats and stairs. Many report doors being left open/ not closing automatically.

01:24 Call 2 from a resident: **Damiana Lewis** on floor 12, in Flat 96 calls the control room and says there is a fire in her kitchen and she cannot breathe. She exited the building at 01:28.

01:24 Pumps are made 10 and a request sent for police to attend. O’Keefe advised Dowden to increase pumps as he knew there had been calls for help from within tower and the sight of flaming debris falling off the building.

Dowden does not consider whether the advice to residents to stay put should change.

01:25

- Call 3 from a resident: **Denis Murphy** on floor 14, Flat 111 calls and says he can smell smoke but there is none in his flat. Toward the end of the call he says there is smoke in his flat. He is told to stay in his flat and that they will tell crews where to find him. He is told to block the door to stop smoke coming in. The information is not recorded on the system VISION as a service request. Denis died in the fire.

- Call 4 from a resident: who gave his flat as 91 and said he was scared. It is likely this was **Abdeslam Sebbar** from Flat 81 who died in fire.

- **Meron Mekonnan** in flat 163 on Floor 19 is woken by a call from her aunt. She runs out the flat with her daughters. She began walking down at about level 15 or 16 she hears a male voice in a clear English accent shout ‘Go Back! Go Back!’. She said she had ‘assumed something terrible, something worse was happening below’. It caused panic and the group ran back upstairs. She ignored the shouted advice and went down the stairs. She left the building at 1:32 with her two daughters.

01:26

- FF Badillo leaves the tower and meets Melanie Urbano Ramirez who says her sister Jessica is still in flat 176 on Floor 20. Badillo says he will rescue her.

- Call 5 from resident **Helen Gebremeskel** from Flat 186 on the 21st floor, who says the whole building is alight. She says she is outside (she was in fact outside the flat not the building). Helen was with the El Wahabi family (Flat 181) in the lobby. They told her the whole building was affected. They all went into the stairwell but could not go. Down as there was a group of people coming up. She says they said they should go back to their flat. She thought this instruction came from the FFs.

Helen and her daughter sought refuge with the Gomez family in Flat 182 and exited the building with them at around 3:37

The El Wahabi family: **Abdulaziz, Fouzia, Mehdi, Yasin and Nur Huda died.**

- Call 6 from **Katarzyna Dabrowska** of Flat 95 on Floor 12 and a neighbor of Damiana Lewis (Call 2) says there is fire coming through the window and smoke through the main door. She is told to put sheets or towels down to stop the smoke and that they will tell the crews. The CRO does not record the message on VISION. She exited the building at 02:40.

- Two residents (Rhea Rojo from flat 91 on floor 12 and Nadia Jafari from Flat 86 on Floor 11) stepped out of the lift on the ground floor. Smoke billowed from the lift as they did this.

The picture shows the fire at 01:26.



01:26 MPS (Police) declare a major incident. At 01:28 PC sends a message saying the building is being evacuated.

At 01:29 MPS Inspector. Sends a message to contact RBKC as they will need to rehouse residents.

01:27 Message sent to control room asking for two additional Aerial Ladder Platforms. 30 seconds later a call was sent to make pumps 15.

Dowden said this was a pivotal change, due both to the spread of the flames but also the number of residents exited who had been subjected to smoke inhalation.

01:28 Dowden sends a message to the control room ‘Persons reported’ which means that people were involved with the fire.

He continued to hold the view that the fire could be contained. He could at this point not remember having received any information about whether fire had penetrated the tower. At this

point in the course of an investigation Dowden did say that all of his previous experience had gone out of the window. (10.98)

Saying...

'there were probably moments when I did feel helpless. It's a very, very difficult place to be as an incident commander when it's just... it's just relentless. ... this was like nothing else I had ever experienced before. The ferocity, the way that fire was developing'

When the persons reported message come through to the control room, CRO Gotts thinks 'this is worse than Lakanal'.

01:28 – FF activities in the tower 01:38

FF Badillo was making his way in the lift to floor 20. Lift stopped at Floor 15. Lift filled with black smoke, he got out and made his way to the lobby door and went down the stairs.

Between floor 10 and 14 FFs met 2 male adults, one who said his father was bedbound in their flat on floor 16. He radioed information to the bridgehead but does not recall if it was confirmed as received. It was heard by 2 other FF who went to Floor 16.

The 2 FF went to floor 16 where they found a man by the lobby door and another lying on the lobby floor but unconscious. They helped them to the stairwell and then went into the first flat they could find (probably 136) to rescue the casualty. They found no-one, were low on air and left floor 16.

Dowden noticed a large amount of debris falling of the building and told the FFs who had been working the covering jet to move back. He realized then that the covering jet had had no effect in suppressing the fire.

- **Natasha Elcock** from Flat 82 (Floor 11) calls 999 at 01:28. She says there is smoke in the lobby. CRO advises her to keep the doors closed and explains she will tell the crews. No service request is created to pass the message to the crews. It may have been written on a piece of paper and passed to another CRO who was collecting notes of people who were trapped with a view to passing them to the incident ground together. Natasha, her partner and child eventually exit the building at 04:47.
- **Nadia Jafari** leaves her flat on floor 11 in the lift with her father. There are others in the lift too. The lift stops suddenly at floor 10 and there is an inrush of smoke. She has to close her eyes and couldn't breathe. The lift doors closed, and it continued down; it was dark and full of smoke. When she gets to the ground floor, her father is not in the lift.

The following bodies were found on floor 10 and are thought to have left the lift when the doors opened. **Mohamednur Tuccu (floor 19); Khadija Khalloufi (floor 17) and Ali Yawar Jafari (floor 11)**. Mohamednur and Khadija's bodies were carried out at 02:28 and Ali Yawar's at 03:34.

01:29 Pumps are made 20 (2 minutes after the decision to make them 15)

Dowden does not have a plan for how to deploy the pumps. His plan was to continue to deploy people conduct search and rescue and firefighting activities. He ordered a staging area (holding zone) for FF to be set up on ground zero.

The fire had reached the top of the building (floor 23). The only firefighting measure Dowden had identified was to send a crew to the roof to set up a line from which FF could hose downward into the flame.

Dowden did not declare the fire a Major Incident as he was occupied with managing resources. He accepted that the situation was more than he could cope with.

A control room operator called the London Ambulance Service (LAS) and asked them to attend. She told them lots of people were stuck in their flats.

- **Zainab Deen** called the MPS and told them she was on floor 14, that the fire was coming into the building and that she had a baby. Zainab and her son **Jeremiah** died in the fire.
- An MPS operator received a call from a female caller who says she is from flat 142 (floor 17). She reported smoke and flames at the window. She said the fire was in the flat next door. This was probably **Husna Begum**. She, her parents and two brothers died in the fire. Their names were **Rabeya Begum, Kamru Miah, Mohammed Hanif and Mohammed Hamid**.

- **Corinne Jones** (flat 145 on floor 17), her partner Larry Castro and two sons, evacuated. On the stairwell she met another group some going up and some down. They seemed to be questioning and panicking. No one responded when she asked where the fire was so she went downstairs. They left the tower at 01:30.
- At 1:30 CRO makes a return call to **Jessica Urbano Ramirez**. Jessica confirms that she is in Flat 201 on the 23rd floor. The CRO spends 55 minutes on the phone with her. She is in a flat with 10 other people. During the early stages of the call she tells Jessica the fire is on floor 4. In previous calls to her mother Jessica had said she was on floor 18 and was going to come down the stairs.

00:15 – 00:31 **The upward migration of occupants** (10:287 – 10:292)

Special Note

The remains on floor 23 included 15 people from lower floors...

Sakina and Fatemah Afrasehabi (floor 18); Hamid Kani (floor 18); Berkti and Biruk Haftom (floor 18); Gary Maunders (Floor 19), Ernie and Majorie Vital (Floor 19), Amal and Amaya Tuccu Ahmedin (Floor 19); Amna Idris (Floor 19); Debbie. Lampral (floor 19); Mariem and Eslah Elgwahry (floor 22)

There was a significant increase in the number of people on the stairs after 1:15. Before then 26 people had left using the stairs and two using the lifts. Between 01:15 and 00:31 a further 77 left via the stairs. It was during this time that a group made their way up to floor 23 by around 01:30.

It is likely that the great majority of those that died there were in the group that moved upwards. The evidence suggests they might have thought a helicopter would rescue them for the roof; that there was a fire lower down and some thought they had been given instructions to go up rather than down.

Dr Lane suggested other possibilities about the state of the stairs... but some did manage to go down.

It's not possible to reach any conclusions about why people went up, and it's unlikely there will be more evidence.

01:30 First message is sent by the MPS to marshal the NPAS helicopters.