

Witness Name: Sharon Harmer
Statement No: [1]
Exhibits: SH/1 - 12
Dated: 28th October 2024

THE CRANSTON INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHARON HARMER

I, Sharon Harmer, Business Operational Support Lead, Met Command and Control at the Metropolitan Police Service, based at 109 Lambeth Road, London will say as follows:-

Introduction

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Service ('MPS') in response to a witness evidence request dated 30 July 2024. I am authorised to make this statement on behalf of the MPS.
2. I have worked for the MPS since March 1995, initially as a call operator and then in various posts on promotion in the Command and Control Centre ('MetCC', also referred to as MO12). In my current post, I have responsibility for the Operations Support office at MetCC; this also includes USU, which is the CAD User Support Unit who have responsibility the administration of CAD and CHS (including how those systems interact with other emergency services). CAD stands for Computer Aided Despatch and CHS stands for Call Handling System, both of which are part of available systems to deal with 999 calls.
3. I have been asked to deal with a number of queries arising from a 999 call received by the MPS on the 24 November 2021, concerning the events which are being investigated by the Cranston Inquiry.

999 call to MPS

4. The tragic events concerning the small boat that capsized in the Dover Strait on the night of 23/24 November 2021 were the subject of a Marine Accident Investigation Report. I have been referred to page 14 of their report which states: *By 0237, the HM Coastguard migrant tracker had reached incident Lima, incident Kilo having been created by MRCC London based on a call to the Metropolitan Police from a migrant boat in the Dover Strait*
5. A search of the MetCC systems reveals that the relevant call to police referenced here was received at 02.10.16 hours on the morning of 24 November 2021 and generated CAD 514/24Nov21. I exhibit the documentary record of this CAD as my exhibit SH/1 **INQ007150**. The call was not received from the migrant boat but from a man ringing from a London location, who said that his friend had texted him to say they had been in a small boat coming from France, they are now in the water and are going to die. The caller provided coordinates for the location.
6. The call lasted for 17 minutes and 50 seconds and I exhibit the audio recording of the call as SH/2 **INQ010404**
7. The call was referred to the Maritime Coastguard Agency ('MCA') via the electronic link at 02.24:49 and via telephone at 02:27:06. I exhibit a recording of that audio referral as SH/3 **INQ010403** The caller was informed of the referral.
8. There was a further 999 call to the MPS at 05.08 hours on 24 November 2021, which generated CAD846/24Nov21 The caller gave his name as **Name** and he was calling from a mobile phone from a London location. **Name** said his friend was crossing from Calais to the UK, the boat was broken and he (the friend) was in the sea. He identified the friend as Mohammed. He also said he believed the incident had already been reported. This call was also referred to the MCA, via the electronic link at 05:16:42 hours, and also by phone at 05:26:45. Kent police were also informed by the MPS operator by 05:37:47. I exhibit the documentary record of CAD846 as SH/4 **INQ003928** and the relevant audio recordings as SH/5 **INQ010399** (incoming call), SH/6 **INQ010400** (call to MCA), SH/7 **INQ010401** (call to Kent Police) and SH/8 **INQ010402** (call to **Name** informing reported to MCA and Kent Police).

Level of involvement of MPS with small boat crossings in the Dover Strait

9. In general the MPS only has responsibility for anything occurring within its geographical boundaries. There are exceptions to this such as counter-terrorism and protected persons. However in relation to policing of UK coastal areas, the MPS has no jurisdiction. The Metropolitan Police District has no coastline within it. The MPS Marine Support Unit deals with policing on the River Thames.
10. Any 999 call requiring a policing response is sent to the police force area relevant to where the call is made, regardless of where the incident is. Therefore the MPS will not receive any 999 calls from persons on small boats in the Dover Strait. This is exemplified by the relevant incident, where the two calls received in the early hours relating to persons on small boats were from friends ringing from the London area. To give another scenario, a caller contacting the police from Aberdeen via 999 to give information about an incident in Scarborough, would be routed to Police Scotland. The receiving force would then pass on any relevant information to the force or agency where the incident is happening.
11. Any 999 call relating to a small boat crossing in the Dover Strait where the caller was within London would come into MetCC. The operators that would take the call do not have specific training to deal with incidents within coastal waters of the UK, but they would be expected to deal with any incident of that kind the same way they deal with any maritime incident on the Thames. This would mean informing the coast guard as soon as possible by following the CAD Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and using the electronic link EXP/MCA where the information is passed to the Coast Guard.
12. All of our SOPS require the operators to follow 'Who, What, Where and When' principles when obtaining information from callers. CAD SOPS detail the guidance and instructions to take depending on the incident. EXP/MCA is the electronic link within our Command and Control system to pass information to the Coast Guard. I exhibit a page of the electronic CAD SOP as an example, which shows what to do for a call classified as a marine incident (exhibit SH/9 **INQ003933**).

13. I have been shown a document which is described as an MOU between the Marine Policing Unit and the London Coastguard (exhibit SH/10 **INQ003934**). This does not really have a bearing on the first contact operators in MetCC as their primary focus is to get information for the call they are handling and alert the relevant agencies.
14. I have checked our records and found a briefing email and power point that went out on the 1st June 2018 to all then MetCC staff briefing them on how to pass incidents electronically to the MCA. I exhibit this as SH/11 **INQ008994**.
15. The number of calls received by the MPS relating to small boats in the Dover Strait is very small, especially considered as a proportion of all calls referred for MCA attention. I have caused an officer in MetCC, PS Name, to undertake a search of 2 periods, firstly covering a 3 month period after the incident the Inquiry are concerned with, and then looking at the same period a year later. This gives an indication of numbers received by the MPS. I exhibit his MG11 police statement as exhibit SH/12 **INQ008995**.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed: Personal Data _____

Dated: 28th October 2024