

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r 27. 2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s. 9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5B

URN

Statement of: PS Neil Fraser 333CN

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18') Occupation: Police Officer

This statement (consisting of 3 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Witness Signature: *Neil Fraser 333CN* Date: 02/01/2020

This statement details a licensing visit to Aquarium Nightclub, 256 – 260 Old Street, Islington, EC1V 9DD in the early hours of New Year’s Day. I also outline my significant concerns about the manner in which the venue is being operated and the associated serious crime and disorder taking place both inside and in the vicinity of the venue.

I am the licensing Sergeant for Islington Borough. I manage a team of four licensing officers, based at Islington Council offices, 222 Upper Street. The team are responsible for dealing with all licensing premises across Islington Borough. Our role involves proactive patrols of these premises, offering help and reassurance to patrons and management, as well as ensuring that venues fully uphold the licensing objectives. We are also responsible for working with venues when incidents do occur and submitting reports, action plans and review files when necessary.

On Tuesday 31st December 2019, I was on duty in company with PC Loizou, PC Peace and PC Emanuel. We were working a nightshift as part of the Policing plan for New Year’s Eve celebrations. Throughout the evening we conducted visits to licensed premises throughout the borough in order to ensure the venues were operating in keeping with the licensing objectives.

At about 2.30am we attended Aquarium Nightclub. Previous engagement with the venue had advised us that they were hosting a regular event called ‘EPIC NYE PARTY’. This event was running from 9pm until either 6am or 7am. Upon arrival at the scene, we made our way to the front entrance of the venue on Old Street. I immediately noted the area outside was very congested and chaotic, with patrons from the venue arguing with door staff and one another. I saw one of the door staff dealing with an exceptionally irate male and female who appeared to be missing property from inside the venue. The female was shouting and swearing at the door supervisor, as he would not allow her re-entry to the venue to collect property. I noted the area by the front door was very congested and door staff were struggling to keep control of people coming in and out. There appeared to be issues inside the foyer area. I could not see anyone who appeared to be in charge taking control of the situation. I felt it necessary to enter the venue in order to ascertain exactly what the issue was and who was taking control. I identified myself as a Police officer to the door supervisor on the barrier. I advised him that I needed to come past the barrier in order to enter the venue. The door supervisor held his arm out and prevented my colleagues and I from getting past him, asking us to wait where we were. I explained to the door supervisor that we had legal powers to enter the venue and asked him to let us past. The door supervisor reluctantly let us through.

Upon entering the foyer, I was immediately struck by the chaotic scene. The stairwell leading down to the basement of the club was blocked with patrons and SIA pushing and shoving in an attempt to move. I could hear people swearing in frustration at the door supervisors. It was clear that the security did not have proper control of the situation. It appeared that security were making attempts to eject a patron who had been smoking inside the venue, however were unable to do so due to the congestion on the stairs. We were met by the DPS,

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Apler Satici. Mr Satici attempted to intervene with little success. At this stage I asked PC Emanuel to collect a body worn video camera from our car. PC Loizou was able to track down the head door supervisor, Billy, who had been dealing with disorder outside. PC Loizou asked Billy to intervene in the situation taking place on the stairwell. After a few minutes, Billy had been able to push past the crowds blocking the stairs, reach his colleagues and facilitate the ejection of the male. We were then able to make our way down the stairs and into the office of the club. We had a lengthy discussion with Mr Satici and the other manager, Mr Bassil Alhakim. We discussed the issues that we had witnessed and outlined our concerns re the complete lack of control of the entrance / exit of the venue, including the stairwell. We also highlighted the risk of disorder owing to patrons becoming frustrated about being unable to leave, noting that some had told us they had been waiting half an hour to get out of the club.

Upon concluding our discussions, we left the office and made our way back to the stairwell. I noted that the stairwell was once again blocked with patrons with security stuck in the middle. Patrons were pushing against each other and security were struggling to facilitate any form of movement. I noted security escorting an exceptionally drunk male from the club. This male was so unsteady on his feet he had to be held up by security. Security were initially unable to eject the male owing to the blockage in the stairwell. After a few minutes, the head doorman, Billy attended and was finally able clear the blockage. Only with the assistance of security were we able to make our way up the stairs and out of the venue. Upon leaving, I noted that the chaotic scene I had witnessed on arrival was still ongoing. Patrons and security were pushing one another; there was confusion as to who was leaving and who was going to the smoking area. People were attempting to climb over the high barriers to the smoking area. The atmosphere outside the venue was exceptionally tense, with people shouting and swearing at each other on their mobile phones.

From what I had witnessed in the venue, I was concerned that the management did not have proper control and that security were clearly inexperienced and out of their depth. The head doorman, Billy was clearly experienced and trying hard to keep control, however was failing owing to lack of support. I was concerned that the risk of disorder was high. The venue apparently had 960 patrons present although I would be surprised if this number was accurate. It was clear that they could not cope with this number let alone any additional numbers. We asked for the DPS to join us outside the venue to discuss the further issues noted. I asked Mr Satici to consider stopping further admittance and consider implementing a soft close. Mr Satici agreed to this. I asked the control room to request uniformed Police units to monitor the venue owing to the risk of disorder.

I am aware that at about 4.30am a disturbance took place outside the venue. This disturbance appears to have been a continuation of an incident which started inside the venue. Officers witnessed a large group of males fighting in the street, with one male armed with a belt, which was intended to be used as a weapon. A male was found with head injuries, believed sustained by being struck on the head with a Champagne bottle. Two males were arrested at the scene. All persons involved are believed to have been patrons from Aquarium.

Unfortunately, this incident is not unique as the venue regularly comes to Police attention owing to incidents of serious crime and disorder. The venue has become a crime generator for violent offences in the early hours. It appears that despite numerous Police interventions with the venue management, the venue is incapable of operating safely, without its patrons engaging in fighting both inside and outside the venue.

On 7th December, Police submitted an application to review the premises licence (and shadow licence) for Aquarium Nightclub. This application was made following a long period of engagement with the venue management in an effort to improve the operation and reduce violent crime. The hearing for this review is scheduled for 23rd January. Since this review was submitted, we have seen four incidents of crime / disorder at the venue. These include an assault on the head doorman, disorder in the cloakroom area of the venue requiring numerous Police officers to attend to restore order, a male alleging assault by staff who was subsequently robbed once outside and the incident described above on New Year's Eve resulting in a GBH. I feel that we have now reached the stage where the venue poses a real risk to public safety. I feel that if the venue was to continue operating in its current form, further incidents of violence leading to serious injury are inevitable. I do not feel that the management at the venue are able to safely control its patrons and that immediate intervention is essential. I have discussed my concerns with the Local Authority and have outlined

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our intention to submit an application for a summary review of the premises licence with a view an immediate suspension of the licence. I have asked PC Loizou to prepare an application for the consideration of a Superintendent to authorise an application for a summary review under section 53A of the Licensing Act 2003. I consider this action necessary and proportionate given the circumstances.



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