

Grenfell Infrastructure Update (October 2021)

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Update
October 2021



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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the progress that has and is currently being made by Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy which took place on 14 June 2017. It highlights the extensive work being undertaken across the Service in response to the formal recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report published on 30 October 2019.
- 1.2 The report reflects the transparent approach undertaken by each part of the service to see the improvements that need to be made following the Phase 1 Report recommendations. This in turn meets the recent requirement, in a letter from Lord Greenhalgh on 30 September 2021, about informing the local communities of the Service's progress in this area. This report also summarises the central support funding being made available to BFRS and how this is being used to assist in the development and implementation of new technologies to address the formal recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower Phase 1 Report published on 30 October 2019.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Grenfell was the most significant high-rise fire the Country has experienced in living memory. The resulting Public Inquiry is still on-going. Phase 1 established a factual narrative of events, highlighting the organisational learning for London Fire Brigade (LFB); Phase 2 is currently underway (having been delayed by the COVID pandemic) and is divided into eight modules which include how the construction of the Tower affected the fire on 14 June 2017.
- 2.2 As a result of the Grenfell Tower Fire, BFRS has undertaken a number of actions to enhance how it manages the risks associated with large, complex buildings. Since the publication of the Phase 1 report, it continues to work through the 46 recommendations to inform the evolving improvement plan.
- 2.3 BFRS have also taken the opportunity to collaboratively work with other services and agencies to review policy and procedures involving fires in high-rise buildings to review and assure how effectively it responds to these incidents. There are a number of projects and activities that were already taking place as part of the Service's improvement journey that reflect some of the lessons of Grenfell that also form part of the ongoing work.

3. Response Activity

- 3.1 The Technical Team has oversight of the Site-Specific Risk Information database, ensuring the Service's obligations under Section 7 (2) (d) of the fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, and has previously conducted a review

of all high-rise risks. This involved the Data and intelligence and Risk Information teams working together to identify all structures in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes over 18 metres and then cross referencing this with those buildings that are residential or commercial of six floors and over. This gives it the confidence to understand the high-rise in its area. These buildings are automatically given a high-risk status which ensures an annual review and visit from the local fire station which in turn results in the production of a tactical plan to assist crews to resolve any operational incidents on these sites. When completed, the risk information and plans are made available to all frontline appliances through Mobile Data Terminals and are also shared with the neighbouring services up to 10 km from the risk site. This information is also made available within Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and relevant information is made available to the operational crews whenever they are sent to an incident involving high-rise buildings.

- 3.2 Whilst waiting for further changes to national high-rise firefighting policy, BFRS has issued interim guidance for operational considerations related to building managers' stay put procedures and the evacuation requirements of large residential buildings. This guidance required the Response and protection Teams to work together to establish the evacuation strategy for each building during intelligence gathering for inclusion in the Site-Specific Risk Information. The guidance also raised awareness of how the move from a Stay put to a Simultaneous Evacuation during a fire and highlighted the foreseeable scenarios where incidents occur in high-rise residential buildings that challenge both the structural integrity and compartmentation in the event of fire. The guidance also reiterated the incident Commander's authority to review the evacuation strategy for the building from an operational perspective.
- 3.3 The policies and training packages for operational staff were reviewed drawing attention to the need for external safety observers to monitor external fire spread from the compartment of origin and to clarify the risks of how combustible exterior materials and poor building management can lead to accelerated fire growth. Additionally, working with Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and the other two Thames Valley Services the pre-determined attendance was reviewed to ensure that it reflected the requirements identified for fires in high-rise.
- 3.4 Having undertaken remedial action, BFRS has turned its attention to ensuring our preparedness for the introduction of any changes in National Operational Guidance by engaging in the consultation process and ensuring that this guidance is fully implemented across the Thames Valley. This work is being undertaken in joint partnership with both Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services introducing both collaborative equipment and procedures. Work in this area continues as new guidance and information is released.
- 3.5 Over the coming months the Site-Specific Risk Information that is collected by the operational staff will become incorporated into the

Premises Risk Management System (PRMS). This will mean that data collected from Response, Prevention and Protection will be in the same place offering a single location for all information on the buildings and their occupants. This will give added insight into the activities of other departments with reference to specific buildings and will continue to improve the way in which departments collaboratively work with each other.

4. Prevention Activity

- 4.1 A broad range of vulnerabilities are known to be present in the Service area's high-rise buildings. These are as diverse as people with a disability, non-UK national (presenting a language barrier), vulnerable adults and families, those with oxygen dependency, hoarding, drug and alcohol dependency. This has led to difficult engagements sessions which were poorly attended. Work has subsequently been undertaken by the Prevention Team with the respective Councils, partner agencies and Residents Associations to improve engagement activities with high-rise and other high risk residential buildings.
- 4.2 BFRS has written to all residents in the six highest risk buildings within its area in an attempt to promote further engagement and the Central Prevention Team has used a number of additional resources to improve both the engagement and the safety for those in high-rise buildings. This prevention work continues with visits to specifically vulnerable residents picking up as the changes to COVID pandemic advice changes.
- 4.3 Where there is specific information or concern with particular high risk residential buildings including high-rise from operational incidents or the public, the Prevention team proactively engage with the residents and the Duty Holder to mitigate the identified issue or risk. This highlights the collaboration work that goes on between Prevention and the operational crews.

5. Protection Activities

- 5.1 The Protection Team continues to maintain its knowledge and understanding of the construction of modern buildings and how they are being refurbished whilst keeping abreast of evolution of building methods particularly following Grenfell. The Protection Team has carried out a review of all high-rise buildings and is aware of all those currently utilising both non-flammable and flammable cladding. It continues to work proactively alongside Duty Holders to advise and support them with any necessary changes to the buildings.
- 5.2 The Protection Team continues to concentrate their focus on the highest risk premises and, as the Enforcing Authority for common areas in high-rise buildings, proactively engages with the Duty Holders to maintain

compliance and take enforcement action where necessary. The introduction of the recent Fire Safety Act 2021 places responsibilities on the Duty Holders to manage and reduce the risk of fires in buildings containing multiple domestic premises; as this becomes legislation the Protection Team will continue to work with the Duty Holder to improve safety in high-rise buildings.

- 5.3 The Protection Team is also improving their collaboration with the Response crews by undertaking protection training with them. This will improve the Response crews understanding of basic fire safety issues which will increasingly become more apparent whenever they visit higher risk premises and ensure a greater awareness of concerns in these premises they will need to be addressed.

6. Operational Assurance and Training Department Activities

- 6.1 In the wake of the recommendations coming out of the Phase 1 report it was necessary to assure the Service's preparedness of high-rise building fires through thematic reviews and external audits. The Operational Assurance Team has, over the last six months collated information following on from a number of incidents the Service has attended. The Team has also arranged a number of high-rise exercises throughout Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes as well as the Fire Service College. The aim is to ensure that as many varied operational staff receive the opportunity to undertake a high-rise exercise and feedback into the Operational Assurance Team as well as getting the opportunity to participate in such an exercise.
- 6.2 From the high-rise incidents and exercises a number of recommendations have been made that have now been placed onto the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan with the resulting actions being given to the appropriate personnel and departments. The objective of all this activity is to improve the way in which BFRS responds to and manages high-rise incidents which in turn will feed into the overall recommendations following the Phase 1 report.
- 6.3 The Training department has been working hand in hand with the Operational Assurance Team and feeding into the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan to ensure that learning points are captured. It has created training packages that reflect policy and procedural changes to high-rise buildings and other closely associated procedures. This has involved specific breathing apparatus training and positive pressure ventilation training to reflect national best practice. There is work taking place to ensure that the Thames Valley Services aim to have replicated these across the whole of the Thames Valley area. This will form part of the training required for the new collaboratively purchased breathing apparatus set.

6.4 In the wider context work is taking place to include multi-agency training and exercises that will reflect the multi-agency approach required for fires in high-rise buildings. This will and has included the other blue light services as well as the local Councils. This reflects the concern BFRS has for how to evacuate these large buildings if and when required.

7. Improvement Plan Following the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report and a Look Forward to Phase 2

7.1 Following the Phase 1 report, there were 46 recommendations made that BFRS have incorporated into an improvement plan. This plan is coordinated through the Technical Team and sponsored by the Head of Protection and Assurance. Oversight is managed through a Grenfell Working Group which reports progress to the Overview and Audit Committee via the Performance Monitoring Board and Operational Assurance Group.

7.2 Of the 46 recommendations that were identified in the Phase 1 report BFRS have been able to complete 15 of them. It has made some significant progress in 28 and is prepared for change in the last three. From the table below (Table 1) BFRS has made some significant progress in a number of areas which it had previously been prepared for change.

Table of previous and current actions based upon Phase 1 recommendations

| | Actions from Previous Report (March 2021) | Actions Currently |
|--|---|-------------------|
| BFRS has made preparations for this change and is ready to implement | 13 | 3 |
| Currently in Progress | 18 | 28 |
| Complete | 15 | 15 |

Table 1

7.3 Of the 46 recommendations BFRS are directly responsible for 28 and of these have completed 14. Of those that have yet to be completed they are all in progress and in a majority of cases are at the assurance phase in order to identify whether actions have been met. This will form part of the feedback that has come from the recent high-rise exercises and incidents.

7.4 BFRS does not have direct responsibility for 18 of the Phase 1 recommendations as these, in a majority of cases, rests with the responsible person or Duty Holder. As mentioned above Protection have been working with Duty Holders to resolve these but in most cases have been awaiting legislative change. With the Fire Safety Act 2021 coming into legislation and the Building Safety Bill going through Parliament these actions should be able to be progressed further.

- 7.4 Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry focused on the cause of the fire, its subsequent development and the course of events during the night, the principle focus of Phase 2 of the inquiry is on how and why the decisions were made that led to a highly combustible cladding system was fitted on to Grenfell Tower. Phase 2 will also explore other area that emerged from the information gathered during Phase 1. The Phase 2 part of the Inquiry is currently ongoing and it is anticipated that there may well be other recommendations for fire and rescue services to come.

8. Central Funding

- 8.1 In April 2020 an announcement was made by Lord Greenhalgh, the Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities, offering a grant to assist with the implementation of the Phase 1 findings. BFRS received an initial payment of £123,549.85 to drive improvement in Protection. A further £60,000 has been allocated to facilitate a review of all high-rise residential buildings over 18 metres and additional funding of £46,253.86 was provided which BFRS has set aside for research and development and procurement of new equipment.
- 8.2 The initial payment and follow up allocation of £60,000 has been set aside for Protection. This has been used for fixed term employment contracts, training, IT equipment and continues to be used for website development and collaborative working both internally and externally.
- 8.3 The funding BFRS has set aside for research and development and equipment has been used for purchasing equipment such as loud hailers and escape hoods. Additionally, work is presently underway to investigate the equipment and software required to improve the effectiveness of communication between the operational incidents and TVFCS. This will allow the Service to maintain effective control and communication in more complex and dynamic incidents such as the potential evacuation of high-rise buildings.
- 8.4 On 30 September 2021 Lord Greenhalgh sent a further letter to all the chief fire officers regarding the expectation of the Home Office, following the announcement for funding, of the responsibilities each service has to their communities about the lessons learnt and the improvements made following the Grenfell tragedy. This letter highlighted that each fire and rescue service must show the transparent progress they have made meeting the Phase 1 Inquiry’s recommendations and that these recommendations affect all services.

9. Collaboration and Alignment

- 9.1 A significant amount of work continues to take place in respect of collaboration between BFRS, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. This work includes research and

development concentrating on purchase of new equipment. A recent example of this is a collaborative contract for a new beathing apparatus (BA) set between the three services that will improve the effectiveness with which large complex incidents can be dealt. This will remove the need for different BA equipment and will allow any service to use any BA equipment from across the Thames Valley.

- 9.2 BFRS is also continuing to work with its Thames Valley partners and TVFCS to align its procedures and guidance in order to improve the effectiveness with which the Services can all work together at larger incidents that involve more than one fire and rescue service. Specifically, work is being undertaken to align the BA procedures to make effective use of the recent joint BA contract. Work has also been undertaken to ensure that the three services and TVFCS have a joint understanding of high-rise procedures and any changes to National Operational Guidance with respect to high-rise incidents are implemented as efficiently and collectively as possible.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 BFRS has been very proactive in implementing the learning from Grenfell. Much of that learning has been achieved already and certainly the tragedy has focused the collective mind of the Service to prioritise improvements in the way it manages such a potential incident. This will continue to be a priority and certainly there will be additional work for the Service with the publication of Phase 2 of the inquiry. BFRS has made some significant steps to improve the collaborative work it undertakes both internally and externally and this is reflected in the extensive work being undertaken to meet the demands of the inquiry as well as the learning points that have come out of identified areas for improvement.