

Grenfell Infrastructure Update (September 2022)

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Updated September 2022



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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 requirement detailed 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); The Inquiry has now concluded hearings for the eight Phase 2 modules and the Inquiry Panel are in the process of preparing the final report.
- 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 (SSRI) 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

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 strategy 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 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 A project is underway to incorporate the SSRI that is collected by the operational staff into the Premises Risk Management System (PRMS).

This will mean that data collected from Response, Prevention and Protection will be in the same software system offering a single source for all information collated and recorded 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. The introduction of a new SSRI module in PRMS will improve the quality and accessibility of risk intelligence captured on high-risk premises. The new SSRI module in PRMS is due to be piloted in Q3 22/23, followed by a Service wide rollout.

4. Prevention Activity

- 4.1 The Service area's high-rise buildings house a differing range of vulnerabilities which can reduce the likelihood of engagement with preventative advice. These include high-density occupancy, disability, drug and alcohol dependency, hoarding, transient living, and communication difficulties linked to literacy levels and first language.

Following low levels of engagement with community information sessions, the prevention team has worked to build relationships with the respective councils, responsible persons, and residents associations to improve proactive engagement.

- 4.2 BFRS has stratified all high-rise domestic dwellings based upon known protection issues, external wall surfaces and tenancy turnover, enabling prevention information to be offered more frequently to those at greater risk of fire.

The Community Safety Technicians have been trained to recognise fire safety issues within the common parts of high-rise buildings which they pass to protection for investigation.

- 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 responsible person to mitigate the identified issue or risk, highlighting the collaboration work that goes on between the prevention team and 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 enactment of the Fire Safety Act 2021 clarifies that under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Order), owners and/or managers of multi-occupied residential buildings (two or more sets of domestic premises) the Responsible Person (RP) must manage and reduce the risk of fire for the structure and external walls of the building. This includes cladding, balconies and windows and the entrance doors to individual flats, that open on to common parts. These areas were previously covered by the Housing Act 2004 and enforced by Local Authority, Private Sector Housing.
- 5.3 The Home Office are providing a Building Prioritisation Tool, which will enable RPs to undertake an assessment of their building portfolios and target assessment works at the potentially highest risk premises. This is due largely to an anticipated shortage of qualified and competent fire risk assessors, with the requisite knowledge and experience to undertake assessments of External Wall Systems (EWS).
- 5.4 The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 have been introduced under Article 24 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order in order to meet the recommendations that have come out of the Phase 1 Grenfell Tower Inquiry. These Regulations will come into full force on 23 January 2023.
- 5.5 The Regulations impose additional measures on the responsible person (RP) of a multi-occupied residential building and the RP must now be preparing to work on the new regulations in order to meet the requirements by this date. The requirements depend upon the height of the buildings with those above 18m having the most stipulations. These include providing fire services with information about their buildings including floor plans, the state of fire-fighting equipment and other relevant information in order to assist with any fire-fighting action. For all multi-occupied residential buildings including those below 18m the RP must provide information and checks that will assist residents escape safely.
- 5.6 The Building Safety Act 2022 provides for a new regulator (the Building Safety Regulator [BSR]) to be established under the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The aim of the regulator is to secure the safety of people in and around buildings with respect to the risk arising from them. The outcome is to improve the standards of buildings. Within the Act there is an expectation that all higher risk buildings must be registered with the regulator by October 2023 and there will be an additional approvals process for these buildings.

- 5.7 The role of the fire service nationally is to assist the regulator with any fire safety concerns within these building with the proposal of multi-disciplinary teams that may include other agencies as required. Work is presently taking place at a regional level to ascertain the nature and expectations required of these teams and specifically the role that BFRS will have within them.
- 5.8 The Protection Team continues to focus on improving their collaboration with the Response crews by undertaking enhanced protection training as part of the Home Office Protection uplift grant funding programme and High-Risk Residential Building work.
- 5.9 Dedicated fire safety input sessions are aimed at all operational managers from the rank of Crew Commander to Group Commander. The sessions are conducted over a consecutive two-day period, delivered by an external consultant.

Non-operational specialist roles such as Operational Training and Assurance have also been included in the planned sessions.

The training programme is scheduled to be completed by December 2022.

A brief overview of the course content is as follows:

- Applicable legislation – Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 (RRO), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Types of evacuation strategies - types of fire alarm systems to support the given evacuation strategy
- Common types of high-risk premises
- The Fire Brigades duties and what actions to take at a fire safety incident

Following the conclusion of the programme a confirmation of understanding process will be devised. This will improve the Response crews understanding of basic fire safety issues which will increasingly become more apparent whenever they visit higher risk premises.

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 collated information following on from a number of incidents the Service has attended. The Team has also arranged several 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 practical high-rise exercise and feedback into the Operational Assurance Team.

- 6.2 From the high-rise incidents and exercises, several recommendations have been made that have now been placed onto the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan (OAIP) 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 continues to work with the Operational Assurance Team, feeding into the OAIP 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 Extensive work has taken place to include multi-agency training and exercises that will reflect the multi-agency approach required for fires in high-rise buildings. This has included the other blue light services as well as the local Councils.
- 6.5 On 18 March 2022, the Operational Assurance and Operational Training teams hosted Exercise Hammer, a high-rise scenario involving an 18-storey block of flats.
- 6.6 Exercise Hammer was designed to test the capability, response, and operational procedures of BFRS, partner FRSs and agencies at a major incident involving a fire in a high-rise apartment building with large numbers of casualties and evacuating occupants.

The primary objectives were to test and observe:

- The operational tactics employed and Incident Command System (ICS) at a high-rise incident
- The completed areas within the Grenfell Tower action plan
- The undertaking of a move from a stay put strategy to a simultaneous evacuation
- A multi-agency approach to managing what will become a major incident
- Managing rescues, evacuees, and casualties

Over the course of three hours, appliances, crews and officers from Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire FRSs took part in the exercise along with representatives from Milton Keynes Council, Thames Valley Police (TVP) and South-Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). To add elements of realism, multiple role players acted as residents.

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 BFRS identified 45 actions that were identified in the Phase 1 report. To date, BFRS have been able to complete 18 of them and made significant progress in 28.

Table of previous and current progress of actions based upon Phase 1 recommendations

| | Actions from March 2021 Report | Actions from October 2022 Report | Actions from February 2022 Report | September 2022 update |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| BFRS has made preparations for this change and is ready to implement | 13 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Currently in Progress | 18 | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| Complete | 15 | 15 | 17 | 18 |
| Total | 46 | 46 | 46 | 46 |

Table 1

- 7.3 Of the 46 recommendations BFRS are directly responsible for 28 and of these have completed 18. Of those that have yet to be completed they are all in progress and in the majority of cases are at the assurance phase, reviewing the positive actions taken to ensure that the recommendations have been addressed through improvements that have been made.
- 7.4 BFRS does not have direct responsibility for 18 of the Phase 1 recommendations as these, in most cases, rests with the responsible person or Duty Holder.
- 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 Inquiry has concluded hearings for Phase 2. The Inquiry Panel are preparing the final report. It is anticipated that there will be additional recommendations for fire and rescue services to review and action once the phase 2 report is published.

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, a second payment instalment of £97,962 in February 2022, a third payment of £86,060 in September 2022 and an additional payment of £86,060 due to be received in March 2022 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 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 hailer 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. An example of this is a collaborative contract for a new breathing 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 continues to be proactive in implementing the learning from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. The tragedy has focused the collective mind of the Service to prioritise improvements in the way it manages an incident of this nature. This has been recognised in the HMICFRS report published in December 2021. The inspectorate team found that the Service has responded positively and proactively to the lessons learned from this tragedy. Highlighting that the Service is ahead of schedule to audit all high-rise premises clad with aluminium composite material (ACM) and improve its information about high-rise risk.
- 10.2 Progressing outstanding actions to address the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will continue to be a priority. 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.