

# Operational Learning and Assurance: Progress against Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena Inquiry Recommendations

(December 2023)

## Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

December 2023



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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the Services' approach to Operational Learning and Assurance, accounting for local, sector and multi-agency events from which we can identify and implement improvement.
- 1.2 Whilst the content will provide members with some insight into the wider Operational Learning and Assurance process, the focus of this report is to update on progress against two significant inquiries recommendations, those being Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) and Manchester Arena Inquiry (MAI).
- 1.3 The Service takes opportunities to learn from a range of internal and external sources and this process is well embedded and understood across staff groups. By understanding and incorporating the lessons learned from external inquiries the Service assures itself that constant improvement and preparedness for current and emerging risks is built into its processes.
- 1.4 Inquiries like GTI and MAI include monitored recommendations which receive scrutiny by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and whilst the delivery of the recommendations has a significant financial and physical resource implication we have shown that this is a priority for the Service by our allocation of resource to the project.
- 1.5 This report demonstrates the achievements that have been realised following our approach to GTI, which includes a suite of operational information for response crews, training and assurance across a number of staff groups over a sustained period and the purchase of new operational equipment all of which support our response to a wide range of incident types including but not limited to Fires in Tall Buildings and Major Incidents.
- 1.6 As the Service progresses through the MAI project it can be anticipated that we will see a similar range of improvements to our response to significant multi agency incidents that are not limited to the circumstances of the MAI. The introduction of Operational Response Plans (ORP) could be considered an early benefit of the MAI project and it was effectively utilised in the multi agency environment of the recent AI conference at Bletchley Park.

## 2. Operational Learning and Assurance

2.1 The Fire Standard for Operational Learning states that its desired outcome is:

“A fire and rescue service that has developed a learning culture, acting on learning from operational and non-operational activity as well as external sources, to improve their operational response. The service will have embedded the management of learning into their policies, procedures, tailored guidance and training.

The service will have developed a culture which seeks to share their learning with others to improve operational response within their own service; with other fire and rescue services; and with the wider sector if appropriate.”

2.2 The Service’s approach to meeting the requirements of the above standard is delivered by the Operational Assurance Team (OAT).

The OAT co-ordinate the various strands of Operational Learning and Assurance on behalf of the Service, including:

- Exercising
- Station assurance visits
- Incident monitoring
- Operational feedback
- Debriefs
- National operational learning (NOL)
- Joint organisational learning (JOL)

## 3. Operational Assurance Improvement Plan (OAIP)

3.1 The OAIP is a product of the above activities. It is the mechanism the Service utilises to identify and share learning from local and national events and reports emanating from audits and public inquiries.

3.3 A key element of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) Doctrine is that learning is shared across all CAT 1 and 2 Responders through the JOL portal and via the NFCC. The Service can also access and share “Learning Events” through the NOL framework.

## 4. Grenfell Tower Inquiry

- 4.1 This section of the report outlines the progress that has been 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 undertaken across the Service in response to the formal recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report published on 30 October 2019.
- 4.2 The report reflects the transparent approach undertaken by the Service to see the improvements that needed to be made following the Phase 1 Report recommendations. This in turn meets the requirements 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 has been used to assist in the development and implementation of new technologies to address the formal recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower Phase 1 report.
- 4.3 As a result of the Grenfell Tower fire, BFRS has undertaken a significant amount of work to enhance how it manages the risks associated with large, complex buildings across the Service Delivery functions of prevention, protection and response. Much of this work has been delivered in collaboration with partners ensuring operational alignment.
- 4.4 Of the 46 recommendations BFRS adopted 46 actions that were identified in the Phase 1 report. To date, BFRS have completed 37 of them and made significant progress in the 9 that have transferred to business as usual.

## 5. What has been achieved?

- 5.1 Response Activity
- A suite of training packages for operational staff have been created or updated. These include packages for - external wall systems (EWS), evacuation alerting systems and fires in tall buildings
  - Promotion of premises information boxes (PIBs) / building information boxes (BIBs) and awareness for operational crews in how these can be used to support response
  - Thames Valley aligned guidance for operational roles such as Evacuation Commander
  - A programme of operational training and assurance on high-rise procedures and knowledge covering all operational station based staff in the service
  - BFRSs largest ever high-rise exercise completed at Mellish Court
  - Station improvement and preparedness programme dedicated to high-rise carried out

- All high-rise buildings identified, updated and placed on yearly SSRI review schedule. Any new high-rise buildings to be placed as a minimum 'high' risk
- All high-rise risk information to contain the current evacuation policy
- All high-rise building risk information within 10km of neighbouring Services shared on a reciprocal basis
- Service policy was reviewed to consider implications of GTI recommendations – several Thames Valley aligned Operational Information Notes (OINs) produced
- A Thames Valley Command Support project is progressing
- Purchase of equipment such as loud hailer, smoke hoods, additional thermal imaging cameras (TICs) and gas monitors
- Technology upgrade and refresh on Incident Command Unit (ICU)
- Procedures to deal with Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) tested between Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and incident grounds at a number of exercises
- Further objectives identified for the Thames Valley command support alignment project
- Training, assurance and exercising carried out with Thames Valley Fire Control staff in line with new national guidance
- National testing and assurance with Fire and other blue light partner control rooms
- Single point of contact (SPOC) now to be nominated in control for a high rise fire with FSG

## 5.2 Prevention Activity

- A regular programme of interventions at high-risk residential buildings has been instituted to provide residents of higher risk sites with preventative advice
- Prevention staff have received accredited training to recognise fire safety issues and a process to report to Protection teams has been established

## 5.3 Protection Activity

- An inspection of all high-rise buildings in BFRS has been carried out and they now feature in the Services risk-based inspection programme
- All high-rise building SSRI has been updated to include recording of external cladding systems
- Fire Safety training delivered to Operational and Prevention staff
- Webpage set up to allow responsible person (RP) to contact BFRS and inform us of information on design of external walls and other relevant information for high rise buildings
- The role of Station Commander High Risk Residential Buildings was created

- 5.4 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 that was fitted on to Grenfell Tower. Phase 2 will also explore other areas 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.

## 6. Funding

- 6.1 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 received in March 2022 to drive improvement in Protection. A further £60,000 was 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.

## 7. HMICFRS

- 7.1 In the most recent HMICFRS report (October 2023) the inspectorate reported that 'The service should address all the Grenfell Tower inquiry recommendations'.

- 7.2 Of the 9 outstanding actions 5 are actions for TVFCS and 3 have been adopted by the Thames Valley Command Support project.
- 7.3 With a shared control service across the Thames Valley it is vital that where recommendations relate to how our control service deal with incidents that a common, single approach is taken.
- 7.4 BFRS has made good progress in addressing the Grenfell recommendations and continues to be proactive in implementing the remaining actions from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

## 8. Manchester Arena Inquiry

- 8.1 This section of the report outlines the progress that has and is currently being made by BFRS in response to the Manchester Arena Attack which took place on 22 May 2017. It highlights the approach being undertaken across the Service in response to the formal recommendations made by the MAI which were published on 3 November 2022.
- 8.2 As with Grenfell, the report reflects the transparent approach undertaken by the Service to see the improvements and changes that need to be made following the publication of MAI Volume 2: Emergency Response.
- 8.3 The MAI made 149 recommendations, of which 74 have been incorporated into a dedicated improvement plan.
- 50 recommendations apply directly to Fire and Rescue Services (FRS)
  - 24 recommendations apply to multiple agencies including FRS

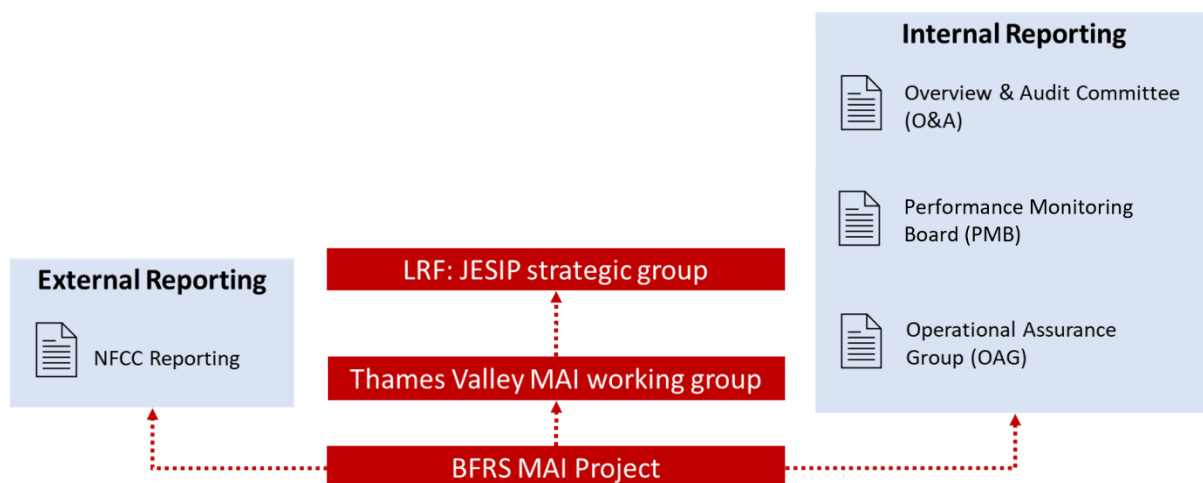
## 9. BFRS approach and progress to date

- 9.1 Following the publication of the Kerslake Report, BFRS Operational Assurance Team (OAT) completed a gap analysis of the recommendations which are actioned and managed by the Operational Assurance Group (OAG) and progress against the actions was monitored and recorded on the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan (OIAP).
- 9.2 BFRS have been working closely with Thames Valley FRS colleagues and also partners within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to ensure an appropriate and coherent response to the recommendations.
- 9.3 Monthly Thames Valley (TV) MAI working group meetings have commenced with representation for the three TV FRS and TVFCS. A single action plan has been created to ensure alignment in progress and response to recommendations. Progress with the action plan delivery is



monitored by the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) strategic group which feeds into the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

- 9.4 BFRS action plan progress will be reported internally by the MAI project team to the Overview and Audit Committee via the Performance Monitoring Board and Operational Assurance Group.
- 9.5 External progress reporting will be delivered to the NFCC which will help to track our progress against FRS across the UK.



- 9.6 National progress to date has led to a new set of Marauding Terrorist Attack (MTA) Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) being implemented for the 3 blue light services. The primary intent behind the changes is to ensure emergency responders make interventions quickly, which was not the case with Manchester Arena. Locally, a co-ordinated effort between the three emergency services has ensured all BFRS commanders above the rank of WC have attended the multi-agency training required to implement the change.
- 9.7 A new mass casualty triage system called the “Ten Second Triage” (TST) has been signed off by NHS England and is now in the process of being implemented in the various trusts across the country. This is targeted to be fully implemented by April 2024. This is designed to be utilised by all emergency responders as a single system, so will be trained and tested by BFRS. We are working with our Thames Valley Fire Service partners, South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS), Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the LRF on the joint procurement and training on TST products and their application. TST is already incorporated into the training our new recruits receive in Immediate Emergency Care (IEC) and a package of training will be rolled out to all relevant staff by our OAT.

## 10. National Fire Service Challenges

10.1 The sector currently faces a challenge in respect the role of a “non-specialist” responder ie frontline firefighters and the ability to satisfy the requirement of the JOPS principles. Nationally, the FBU contest whether MTA response sits within the role of a firefighter. London Fire Brigade (LFB) and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) have reached Collective Agreement with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in relation to response to an MTA incident for all operational staff. These agreements include a skills-based payment enhancement of 2%. Within the Thames Valley, our current policy position is more reliant on the specialist response, but the project will consider our initial response to an incident of this nature.

Several Fire and Rescue Services provide Specialist MTA capability. These are dedicated FRS teams who work closely with Police and Ambulance services to provide a multi-agency response to MTA incidents. These teams fall under the remit of National Resilience in much the same way that Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) does.

## 11. Look Forward

11.1 Many of the recommendations relate to responding to major incidents, which the latest HMICFRS report (2023-25) rates BFRS as adequate. The implementation of these recommendations can only strengthen this position.

11.2 Progressing the agreed actions to address the recommendations from the MAI will be a priority. The Thames Valley FRS and LRF governance structures will enable continued progress and there is 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.