

Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase One and Two Recommendations

(September 2024)



Executive Summary

With the recent publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) phase Two report, this briefing document is intended to provide an update on Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Services (BFRS) activity and service improvement since the tragedy occurred on 14 June 2017. The report also identifies our progress against the phase one monitored recommendations (appendix two). The latter section of the document will provide an early assessment of the phase two inquiry recommendations and their likely impacts to the sector and service.

BFRS have made significant improvement since Grenfell, both in respect of our regulatory role in keeping residents safe in high rise buildings, and also our operational capabilities, which has included policy and procedural changes, training and assurance in dealing with high rise incidents and the purchase of new operational equipment to deploy tactics effectively.

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. Since that commitment, the sector has received three funding streams to support operational improvement and protection activity. The funding breakdown for BFRS to date has been as follows:

Building risk review programme	- £60,000
Grenfell	- £46,000
Protection uplift grant	- £578,000

Whilst there is some tangible spend directly attributed to GTI phase 1 recommendations, it is difficult to accurately put a figure on the cost of Grenfell to the Authority, in so far as the work has extended to a more holistic service delivery approach to improvement across operational preparedness and competence, but also the delivery of our regulatory requirements.

BFRS Response to Phase One Recommendations

Phase one of the inquiry focussed on the factual events on the night of the 14 June 2017. The report was published on 30 October 2019 and it produced 46 recommendations, with 14 of these being aimed solely at London Fire Brigade and a further 15 directed to Fire and Rescue Services more broadly. Whilst the other 17 recommendations were not directly

aimed at FRS, the Service took an approach that it was appropriate to consider how we could support other stakeholders in improving safety across the built environment for the benefit of residents.

In the years that have passed since the tragic 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.

Overview of Prevention Activity

The Service recognised early on after Grenfell the impact this would have to many people living in high rise premises. We took a proactive approach in engaging residents and community groups with the offer to provide support and fire safety advice. Some of the things the Service have in place include:

- A regular programme of interventions at high-rise residential buildings is in place to provide residents with preventative advice
- Prevention staff have been provided training to recognise fire safety issues to signpost to our protection staff
- The home fire safety visit risk stratification takes account of living in high rise as a risk factor, thus escalating the likelihood of a visit in the event other vulnerabilities are present
- The Services website has information and signposting for residents living in high rise buildings and also buildings with a stay put policy
- Where a building has been identified for remediation and / or is under enforcement by BFRS, Prevention staff have attended meetings held for residents in order to provide clarity on steps they can undertake to improve their fire safety behaviours within their flats
- The system for recording Home Fire Safety Visits was updated to include prompts on specific advice to be given when completing visits in high-rise buildings

Overview of Protection Activity

Across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, there were a total of 46 high rise buildings which fell into scope of the building risk review programme co-ordinated by the NFCC. The Service have undertaken audit of all of these, and they now feature in our risk-based inspection programme. In support of the work to regulate these premises, the Service created the

role of Station Commander High Risk Residential Buildings, with the post holder undertaking a degree in fire engineering.

There are a number of buildings which have undertaken required works to remediate unsafe cladding and there are still some which are in the process of remediation works. Our protection team remain regularly engaged as these works progress.

In addition to maintaining our regulatory requirements in respect of audit, the Service has put in place the following:

- Fire Safety training delivered to Operational Staff to support operational response and tactical decision making in the event of fire, but also to provide education in respect of signposting non-compliance to qualified protection staff
- BFRS website providing information to both responsible persons and residents in respect of high-rise fire safety.
- Site specific risk information (SSRI) has up to date information on cladding and evacuation strategy to support operational response and tactical decision making in the event of fire

Overview of Response Activity

Following the phase one report and recommendations, the NFCC established a reporting tool, which services were required to update on a 6 monthly basis. The reporting was broken down into 10 themes and contained a total of 34 actions as identified below: Appendix three in this pack provides the Services assessment that all our requirements are now complete, but with recognition that elements of operational preparedness and competence require regular testing and assurance.

- 1) Operational response fire standards (3 actions)
- 2) Materials in high rise residential buildings (7 actions)
- 3) Section 7 (2)(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (4 actions)
- 4) Plans (1 action)
- 5) Control and incident command communications (1 action)
- 6) Emergency calls (2 actions)
- 7) Command and control (5 actions)
- 8) Equipment (4 actions)
- 9) Evacuation (4 actions)
- 10) Co-operation between emergency services (3 actions)

The bullet points below provide a high-level indication of the operational improvements the Service has undertaken to satisfy the actions contained within the ten themes above:

- 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 and current evacuation policy available to crews
- Service policies reviewed to meet requirements of GTI recommendations – several Thames Valley aligned Operational Information Notes (OINs) produced
- Creation or update to a suite of training packages for operational staff. These include packages for external wall systems (EWS), evacuation alerting systems and fires in tall buildings
- Thames Valley aligned guidance for operational roles such as Evacuation Commander
- Purchase of equipment such as loud hailers, smoke hoods, additional thermal imaging cameras (TICs) and gas monitors to support operations / tactical plan
- Promotion of premises information boxes (PIBs) / building information boxes (BIBs) and awareness for operational crews in how these can be used to support response
- A programme of operational training and assurance on high-rise procedures and knowledge covering all operational staff in the service
- Procedures to deal with Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) in place between Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and incident ground
- 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
- All high-rise building risk information within 10km of neighbouring Services shared on a reciprocal basis
- Technology upgrade and refresh on Incident Command Unit (ICU)

Phase Two Recommendations – Understanding the impacts and requirements for BFRS

Whereas phase one of the Grenfell inquiry focussed predominantly on the events of the night of 14 June 2017 and the operational response, phase two was intended to understand and report on the root cause issues of how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition which allowed the fire to spread in the way it did, in a building designed to support a stay put evacuation.

As such, the key findings consider failings by multiple stakeholders including central government, the Royal Borough of Kensington and

Chelsea Council, the Building Research Establishment, Product Manufacturers and Regulatory Authorities, which includes the London Fire Brigade. The entirety of the 58 phase two recommendations can be found in appendix 2, with varying requirements for the stakeholders identified above.

Below are some of the recommendations specific to FRS and any early considerations from a BFRS perspective as to our current position and potential improvement work. It should be noted that the service has not yet undertaken an in depth assessment of the implications of the recommendations:

- 1) Fire engineers: **We also recommend** that the government, working in collaboration with industry and professional bodies, encourage the development of courses in the principles of fire engineering for construction professionals and members of the fire and rescue services as part of their continuing professional development.

BFRS: In recognition of the likely requirements to enhance capability in this area, BFRS invested in one of our protection Station Commanders to undertake a Fire Engineering Degree, which began in 2022 and is expected to be complete in 2026.

- 2) The Control Room: **We recommend** that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services ("the Inspectorate") inspect the LFB as soon as reasonably possible to assess and report on:
 - the extent to which the control room is now integrated into the organisation.
 - the effectiveness of the arrangements for identifying the training needs of control room staff, delivering effective training and recording its outcomes.
 - the effectiveness of the control room generally.
 - the ability of the control room to handle a large number of concurrent requests for advice and assistance from people directly affected by fires or other emergencies; and
 - the quality and effectiveness of the arrangements for communication between the control room and the incident commander.

BFRS: These were all part of the phase one recommendations for FRS, and as such BFRS can be satisfied are adequately addressed. However, noting the integral role the control room have to play in an incident of this complexity, we

continue to work with TVFRS partners and TVFCS to test and assure our preparedness

- 3) Incident Commanders: **We recommend** that as soon as reasonably possible the Inspectorate inspect the LFB to examine and report on the arrangements it has in place for assessing the training of incident commanders at all levels and their continuing competence, whether by a process of revalidation or otherwise.

BFRS: Our incident commanders are all trained and assessed in line with national operational guidance and standards. Furthermore, all assessments are subject to skills for justice accreditation.

- 4) Operational Planning: **We recommend** that as soon as reasonably practicable the Inspectorate inspect the LFB to examine and report on its arrangements for collecting, storing and distributing information in accordance with section 7(2)(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, and in particular its arrangements for identifying high-risk residential buildings and collecting, storing and distributing information relating to them.

BFRS: These were all requirements of the phase one recommendations for FRS, and as such BFRS can be satisfied are adequately addressed. All high-rise residential buildings are regularly assessed as part of our operational risk information programme.

- 5) Implementing Change: **We recommend** that the LFB establish effective standing arrangements for collecting, considering and effectively implementing lessons learned from previous incidents, inquests and investigations. Those arrangements should be as simple as possible, flexible and of a kind that will ensure that any appropriate changes in practice or procedure are implemented speedily.

BFRS: whilst the Service have a reasonable level of confidence in our operational learning and assurance processes, it should be acknowledged that the HMICFRS inspection of 2023 identified an area of improvement in terms of how quickly the Service addressed lessons learned. This has been a work in progress and will be supported by the new operational learning framework.

- 6) Communications: **We recommend** that fire and rescue services that continue to use low power intrinsically safe radios as part of

breathing apparatus consider reserving them only for situations in which there is a real risk of igniting flammable gases and generally using radios of higher power, particularly in high-rise buildings. There is strong evidence that in general digital radios are more effective than analogue radios. **We therefore recommend** that all fire and rescue services give consideration to providing all firefighters with digital radios.

We recommend that firefighters be trained to respond appropriately to the loss of communications and to understand how to restore them.

BFRS: The Service have just purchased new fireground radios which will meet the requirements of this recommendation in so far as they can operate both as analogue or digital. It is anticipated that these will be on the frontline before the end of the calendar year.

- 7) Water: On the night of the Grenfell Tower fire firefighters were unable to distinguish between different types of hydrants. That is a clear indication of a need for better training, and **we therefore recommend** that basic training on the structure and operation of the water supply system, including the different types of hydrants in use and their functions, be given to all firefighters. Training should also be given on effective measures to increase water flow and pressure when necessary.

We recommend that all fire and rescue services establish and periodically review an agreed protocol with the statutory water undertakers in their areas to enable effective communication between them in relation to the supply of water for firefighting purposes.

BFRS: The service will review our existing position in relation to the above two recommendations and assess whether we have further requirements.

- 8) Deployment of Firefighters: **We recommend** that National Fire Chiefs Council consider whether, and if so in what circumstances, firefighters should be discouraged from departing from their instructions on their own initiative and provide appropriate training in how to respond to a situation of that kind.

BFRS: deviating from a brief would usually be expected to be under unusual or extreme circumstances. BFRS will engage as appropriate with NFCC to identify whether we need to

review existing policy or training in relation to this recommendation.

A College of Fire and Rescue: We welcome the government's ambition to create an independent College of Fire and Rescue expressed in the white paper *Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service* and **we therefore recommend** that the government establish such a college immediately with sufficient resources to provide the following services nationally:

- practical training at all levels supplementary to that provided by individual fire and rescue services;
- education in the form of lectures and seminars on different aspects of the work of the fire and rescue services in order to share experience and promote good practice;
- research into matters that may affect the work of the fire and rescue services, including major fires;
- the development of equipment, policies and procedures suitable for ensuring the effectiveness of fire and rescue services nationally and the safety of firefighters and the public;
- setting and maintaining national standards of managerial competence for senior managers, including control room managers, and providing management training for, and regular assessment of, senior ranks by reference to such standards.

Although it is for the government to decide how the college should be constituted, **we recommend** that it should have a permanent staff of sufficient size to manage its operations and develop its functions in response to the demands of fire and rescue services nationally and the requirements of the board. The college will need access to permanent facilities, including facilities for practical training and education.

BFRS: The Service can see there would be potential benefits from a college of fire and rescue. However, recognising that this is likely years in the making, we will expect to continue making suitable provision for the training of our staff.

Protection impacts from phase two recommendations

Whilst there are limited direct recommendations pertaining to FRS protection activity, BFRS must further consider the implications on other partners and regulators, and what role the service should play in support

of reducing risk within a complex built environment. What the Grenfell tragedy uncovered and as is clearly articulated in the phase two findings, several years of de-regulation has allowed a situation whereby the built environment contains many buildings which have not been built to adequate specification and in some cases will not behave in the case of a fire as they were expected to. Whilst Grenfell highlighted this risk dramatically in respect of tall buildings, there are many other buildings such as medium rise residential blocks of flats, care homes, supported living, etc where stay put evacuation strategies will not be suitable in keeping people safe. Both through our risk-based inspection programme and with intelligence led data from partners, we need to continue to review our legislative and community focussed requirements.

Governance Arrangements

It is expected that there will be some level of national co-ordination from the NFCC in relation to the inquiry findings and recommendations, in which BFRS will of course be a willing partner. However, we will not wait to start furthering our understanding and planning of any required improvements and will establish internal governance to support required change. and be accountable. As with phase one recommendations, the fire Authority will continue to hold officers to account from a governance perspective.