

Sir Martin Moore-Bick

Grenfell Tower Inquiry
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7 February 2018

Dear Sir Martin Moore-Bick

Oversight Committee: London Resilience's response to the Grenfell Fire

The London Assembly's GLA Oversight Committee is tasked, among other matters, to scrutinise the Mayor's functions as they relate to civil contingency arrangements in London.

The Committee has reviewed the response of London Resilience¹ to the Grenfell Tower Fire on 14 June 2017.² Our focus is on the strategic coordinating function of the London Resilience Group as part of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the role of London Local Authority Gold in the immediate aftermath of the fire.³

Drawing on this material, we are making the following contribution to the public inquiry in relation to two of the stated issues to be investigated, namely:

12 (d): What actions were taken on the night of 14 June 2017 to fight the fire, including: (i) First calls and responses; (ii) Assembly of strategy, command and control

13 (b) What was the response of the Tenant Management Organisation, central and local government by way of the provision of emergency relief in the days immediately following the fire?

¹ London Resilience is an umbrella term used to describe the linked bodies within the Greater London Authority with responsibilities for resilience. This is set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

² The committee held two public meetings with Steve Hamm (Head of Programmes, London Resilience), John Barradell OBE (Town Clerk and Chief Executive, City of London Corporation and Chair of the Local Authority Panel), Dr Barry Quirk CBE (Chief Executive, RBKC), Doug Patterson (Chief Executive, London Borough of Bromley) and Eleanor Kelly (Chief Executive, London Borough of Southwark).

³ The transcripts from our meetings are available here: <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-committees/gla-oversight-committee>

The questions we wish the Public Inquiry to pursue are:

- the timing of and the way in which the need for humanitarian assistance was managed within the Strategic Coordinating Group (SGC);
- the failing of the London Local Authority Gold to intervene and provide mutual aid in the immediate aftermath of the fire despite mounting evidence that such help was needed; and
- whether the current legislation and resilience arrangements would have allowed for a more proactive role for the Mayor in addressing the humanitarian need.

Background

The GLA's competency with respect to London's resilience is largely about preparation, although it also has a limited role in the response phase following a serious incident, and then into the recovery phase.

After the abolition of the Government Office for London (GOL) in 2010, the GLA gained responsibility for a number of the key functions for protecting London in the case of emergencies, as set out in the guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its regulations:

- ensuring there is a risk register for London, that the various risks, threats, and hazards from the National Risk Register are combined with local risks
- providing the Secretariat to the London Resilience Forum (LRF),⁴
- back-office work in developing emergency plans that will then be deployed when those risks, previously identified, are realised.

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) has a duty under the Civil Contingencies Act to provide a co-ordinating and support function for the London boroughs in emergency planning. This role is unique in the context of the Civil Contingencies Act and was created because of the complexity of the local authority structure in London. The other large metropolitan areas do not have borough-level resilience forums, as in London, and there is therefore no need for a coordinating body such as LFEPA.

Following the abolition of GOL, the London Resilience team was established in the GLA and then in 2015 was transferred to LFEPA, where it has been integrated with the London Fire Brigade (LFB) resilience team. The function within LFB is largely about producing the London Resilience programme, which is authorised by the London Resilience Forum (LRF).

The types of outputs that come from the London Resilience programme are documents, protocols, and plans. They tend to focus on the multi-agency approach to managing

⁴ The London Resilience Forum (LRF) was established in response to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which introduced local resilience forums, and is chaired by a Mayoral appointee. The Forum is a central part of the wider London Resilience Partnership (LRP), providing a structure through which local agencies could come together to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies, including terrorist incidents and natural disasters.

emergencies in London. These plans are by their very nature of a generic application. Regardless of the nature of the significant event it is the generic pre-determined plans that

are used by the agencies involved. The strategic co-ordination protocol (SCP) is the prime document and it describes how the various agencies in London can come together and how the London Resilience team can support them.

The response to the Grenfell Tower Fire

The Oversight Committee has reviewed the triggering of the strategic co-ordination protocol (SCP) and the way it was used in the immediate hours after the London Resilience duty officer was notified of the fire situation at Grenfell at 03.41 on 14 June. As part of our evidence gathering we were provided with a timeline of the events as partner organisations were contacted to take part in the first Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) [Correct this throughout] meeting, which took place at 05:00, chaired by the London Fire Brigade. Subsequent meetings were chaired by the Metropolitan Police (Met).⁵

An area of particular concern for us has been the timing of and the way in which the need for humanitarian assistance was managed within the SCG. We were told that within the London Resilience suite of plans and protocols, there is one focusing on humanitarian assistance: “it has a scope and it has a pre-determined methodology and structure that could be stood up at a tactical level in an affected area.”⁶ So, as we understand it, the SCG has a humanitarian plan that includes the ability to provide shelter and accommodation. However, different bodies are in charge of different aspects of this plan. While the SCG acts in the immediate hours following a significant incident to develop and maintain a high-level picture, the humanitarian plan would actually be initiated and led by the borough at the locality of the incident unless they trigger a request for mutual aid through the London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) network.

In respect of the response to the Grenfell Tower Fire, “Local Authorities” were represented at the first, and then subsequent SCG meetings, according to the attendee list provided to us.⁷ However, we have been unable to determine who attended, how they communicated with RBKC and indeed how humanitarian needs were assessed in the immediate hours following the fire and what action plans were triggered in response. At our meeting the new Chief Executive of RB Kensington and Chelsea was unable to provide this information.

We have requested copies of the minutes from those meetings but they have not been released to us. We do, however, understand that they are being made available to the public inquiry and would therefore recommend that this line of questioning is pursued within the scope of the inquiry’s “issues to be investigated”.

Given the role of the local authority, in this case RBKC, as the category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, much of our questioning of the London resilience arrangements

⁵ Letter to Andrew Boff from Jeff Jacobs – Attached as appendix 2

⁶ Head of Programmes, London Resilience (page 7, 14 Sept meeting).

⁷ See appendix 3

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Len Duvall AM, Chair of GLA Oversight Committee

has focused on the pan-London support available to the local authority and how it was accessed.

There are broadly two levels of support available to a London local authority facing the consequences of a significant incident. There are resources that can be accessed through a formal arrangement that triggers mutual aid – which is set out in the London Local Gold Resolution – and there are informal offers of support which might be requested by the local authority itself or made by other local authorities who have officers with relevant specialities. We heard of examples where other local authorities reached out to RBKC to offer leadership and specialist support in the hours and days after the fire where they felt that there was a need.

We also heard of London Borough Chief Executives, working through the London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) network, who were in communication with each other as the scale of the impact of the fire on the residents and wider local community became clearer, anticipating that RBKC would make a formal request for help. As we learned during our Committee hearings, the LLAG arrangements had ‘been stood up’, but RBKC did not trigger a request for mutual aid until Thursday afternoon, some 36 hours after the first emergency call was made. It was not until the Friday afternoon that, as we heard, the designated London Gold officer (in this case John Barradell OBE, Chief Executive of the City of London) took control of the situation.

It has become clear through our deliberations that the London Local Authority Gold arrangements do not permit a forced intervention even if evidence is mounting that the local authority can no longer cope and there is consensus among London government practitioners that the quality and pace of the response is not adequate. It is our judgement that the mutual aid processes were not invoked early enough, they should have been invoked immediately. It is our contention that despite the mounting evidence of problems on the ground officers stuck rigidly to the procedures which meant that there was no override mechanism.

A review of the London Local Authority Gold arrangements, commissioned by London Councils, is under way with a view to reporting in February. The Oversight Committee will evaluate its findings once it has been published, but it is clear to us that such a situation must never be allowed to recur and that London government, both local government and the GLA as the strategic authority, itself must have a mechanism by which an intervention to support humanitarian needs can be made.

The role of the Mayor of London

The Strategic Co-ordination Protocol sets out what the Mayor’s role is. The Mayor’s role is to act as the voice of London, to provide information and reassurance to Londoners about what is going on in relation to a significant incident and that it is being responded to by the relevant agencies. The Mayor does not have a direct operational responsibility to respond, although some of the agencies the Mayor has oversight and responsibility for - MPS, LFB and TfL - do. Therefore, the role of the Mayor is to establish what is going on, to be able to

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Len Duvall AM, Chair of GLA Oversight Committee

communicate that appropriately to Londoners and represent London at Ministerial meetings where appropriate.

The Mayor's so-called Gold Cell is a purely internal group at the GLA that convenes in the event of a serious incident to ensure the Mayor is fully briefed and that the operations of the Mayor's office and the GLA are co-ordinated so that the Mayor can carry out his role as the voice of London and not concerned with any strategic decision making relating to the aftermath of the incident. In the future, this will need to be carefully monitored so as not to confuse external partners of the nature of its role.

In the aftermath of such a significant incident, Londoners naturally want to understand who is in charge of the recovery process. The Government created the Grenfell Fire Response Team, led by John Barradell OBE (London Local Authority Gold at the time), four days after the fire to lead the recovery response. This team included London local authorities, the GLA, central government, British Red Cross, the Metropolitan Police and the London Fire Brigade. The involvement of this diverse mix of agencies created the potential for confusion about accountability: was this a central government body reporting to a Minister or Secretary of State or a local government body?

While the Greater London Authority did provide some human resource from its Housing team, communications team and volunteers from Team London, it remains unclear as to why the Mayor was not in a position to have established and overseen the work of the response team himself. It may be that the current resilience arrangements do not permit a more active role even if the Mayoralty wanted to. Alternatively, perhaps the Mayor was content with the local authority led arrangements, albeit steered by central government. Nevertheless, given the pre-existing conditions in the community and the poor relationship between the community and its local authority, perhaps having a more direct Mayoral lead on the response might have helped to address the lack of trust apparent in the community.

An important change to the structure of London governance comes in April 2018 with the abolition of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority when responsibility for providing fire services passes to the Mayor and his appointees, while scrutiny arrangements will become the responsibility of the London Assembly's Fire and Emergency Planning Committee.

As part of these changes, the new Deputy Mayor for Fire and Rescue will also be the Mayoral Adviser on resilience. Furthermore, the Mayor has committed to the creation of a new post of Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) for London who will report directly to the Adviser and the Mayor. Priorities for both the Adviser and the CRO must be to pull together the lessons learned from the different reviews that are being undertaken across different organisations, such as the local authorities and the LFB, and to audit the resources available across London to respond to a significant incident; and to review the roles of the London Resilience Forum to ensure it has the clout to ensure effective resilience planning across partner organisations and across London.

LONDONASSEMBLY

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A longer-term priority should be to develop a standard for city resilience which would be an important step to create an assurance regime that goes beyond existing peer review.

These are issues we will press the Mayor on as the new arrangements come into force.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Len Duvall', written in a cursive style.

Len Duvall AM
Chair of the GLA Oversight Committee